Spetsnaz

THE INSIDE STORY OF THE SOVIET SPECIAL FORCES

Viktor Suvorov

This is the first comprehensive insight for the West into a Soviet "army within an army" whose existence has been known until recently only to a few highly placed people—most of whom would deny it.

The *spetsnaz* Soviet special forces are one of the more shadowy and ruthless secret special forces in the world. Controlled by military intelligence (the GRU), *spetsnaz* units are recruited from the ranks of the toughest officers and men in the Soviet Army, the cutting edge of Soviet military might. In modern warfare their primary task is the destruction of enemy tactical nuclear weapons, but the training of anyone selected for *spetsnaz* prepares him or her for an unlimited range of tasks—from undercover activity as a member of a Soviet Olympic sports team to piloting a midget submarine.

As an officer in the GRU, the author was directly involved in the control and planning of *spetsnaz*. In this revealing and sometimes shocking book, he talks about his own experience; about the military code of an armed force that kills its own wounded; about weapons, strategy, and training. For anyone interested in the true military capability of the Soviet Union, this book is essential reading.

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VIKTOR SUVOROV is the pseudonym of a Soviet army officer who defected to the West. His previous books include *The Liberators* and *Inside the Soviet Army.*

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Spetsnaz

The Inside Story of the Soviet Special Forces

VIKTOR SUVOROV
Translated from the Russian by David Floyd

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To Natasha and Alexander

Spetsnaz

Chapter 1
Spades and Men

Every infantryman in the Soviet Army carries with him a small spade. When he is given the order to halt he immediately lies flat and starts to dig a hole in the ground beside him. In three minutes he will have dug a little trench 15 centimetres deep, in which he can lie stretched out flat, so that bullets can whistle harmlessly over his head. The earth he has dug out forms a breastwork in front and at the side to act as an additional cover. If a tank drives over such a trench the soldier has a 50% chance that it will do him no harm. At any moment the soldier may be ordered to advance again and, shouting at the top of his voice, will rush ahead. If he is not ordered to advance, he digs in deeper and deeper. At first his trench can be used for firing in the lying position. Later it becomes a trench from which to fire in the kneeling position, and later still, when it is 110 centimetres deep, it can be used for firing in the standing position. The earth that has been dug out protects the soldier from bullets and fragments. He makes an embrasure in this breastwork into which he positions the barrel of his gun. In the absence of any further commands he continues to work on his trench. He camouflages it. He starts to dig a trench to connect with his comrades to the left of him. He always digs from right to left, and in a few hours the unit has a trench linking all the riflemen's trenches together. The unit's trenches are linked with the trenches of other units. Dug-outs are built and communication trenches are added at the rear. The trenches are made deeper, covered over,

camouflaged and reinforced. Then, suddenly, the order to advance comes again. The soldier emerges, shouting and swearing as loudly as he can.

The infantryman uses the same spade for digging graves for his fallen comrades. If he doesn't have an axe to hand he uses the spade to chop his bread when it is frozen hard as granite. He uses it as a paddle as he floats across wide rivers on a telegraph pole under enemy fire. And when he gets the order to halt, he again builds his impregnable fortress around himself. He knows how to dig the earth efficiently. He builds his fortress exactly as it should be. The spade is not just an instrument for digging: it can also be used for measuring. It is 50 centimetres long. Two spade lengths are a metre. The blade is 15 centimetres wide and 18 centimetres long. With these measurements in mind the soldier can measure anything he wishes.

The infantry spade does not have a folding handle, and this is a very important feature. It has to be a single monolithic object. All three of its edges are as sharp as a knife. It is painted with a green matt paint so as not to reflect the strong sunlight.

The spade is not only a tool and a measure. It is also a guarantee of the steadfastness of the infantry in the most difficult situations. If the infantry have a few hours to dig themselves in, it could take years to get them out of their holes and trenches, whatever modern weapons are used against them.

■ ■ ■

In this book we are not talking about the infantry but about soldiers belonging to other units, known as *spetsnaz*. These soldiers never dig trenches; in fact they never take up defensive positions. They either launch a sudden attack on an enemy or, if they meet with resistance or superior enemy forces, they disappear as quickly as they appeared and attack the enemy again where and when the enemy least expects them to appear.

Surprisingly, the *spetsnaz* soldiers also carry the little infantry spades. Why do they need them? It is practically impossible to describe in words how they use their spades. You really have to see what they do with them. In the hands of a *spetsnaz* soldier the spade is a terrible noiseless weapon and every member of *spetsnaz* gets much more training in the use of his spade then does the infantryman. The first thing he has to teach himself is precision: to

split little slivers of wood with the edge of the spade or to cut off the neck of a bottle so that the bottle remains whole. He has to learn to love his spade and have faith in its accuracy. To do that he places his hand on the stump of a tree with the fingers spread out and takes a big swing at the stump with his right hand using the edge of the spade. Once he has learnt to use the spade well and truly as an axe he is taught more complicated things. The little spade can be used in hand-to-hand fighting against blows from a bayonet, a knife, a fist or another spade. A soldier armed with nothing but the spade is shut in a room without windows along with a mad dog, which makes for an interesting contest. Finally a soldier is taught to throw the spade as accurately as he would use a sword or a battle-axe. It is a wonderful weapon for throwing, a single, well-balanced object, whose 32-centimetre handle acts as a lever for throwing. As it spins in flight it gives the spade accuracy and thrust. It becomes a terrifying weapon. If it lands in a tree it is not so easy to pull out again. It is far more serious if it hits someone's skull, although *spetsnaz* members usually do not aim at the enemy's face but at his back. He will rarely see the blade coming, before it lands in the back of his neck or between his shoulder blades, smashing the bones.

The *spetsnaz* soldier loves his spade. He has more faith in its reliability and accuracy than he has in his Kalashnikov automatic. An interesting psychological detail has been observed in the kind of hand-to-hand confrontations which are the stock in trade of *spetsnaz*. If a soldier fires at an enemy armed with an automatic, the enemy also shoots at him. But if he doesn't fire at the enemy and throws a spade at him instead, the enemy simply drops his gun and jumps to one side.

This is a book about people who throw spades and about soldiers who work with spades more surely and more accurately than they do with spoons at a table. They do, of course, have other weapons besides their spades.

Chapter 2
Spetsnaz and the GRU

It is impossible to translate the Russian word *razvedka* precisely into any foreign language. It is usually rendered as 'reconnaissance' or 'spying' or 'intelligence gathering'. A fuller explanation of the word is that it describes any means and any actions aimed at obtaining information about an enemy, analysing it and understanding it properly.

Every Soviet military headquarters has its own machinery for gathering and analysing information about the enemy. The information thus collected and analysed about the enemy is passed on to other headquarters, higher up, lower down and on the same level, and each headquarters in turn receives information about the enemy not only from its own sources but also from the other headquarters.

If some military unit should be defeated in battle through its ignorance of the enemy, the commanding officer and his chief of staff have no right to blame the fact that they were not well enough informed about the enemy. The most important task for every commander and chief of staff is that, without waiting for information to arrive from elsewhere, they must organise their own sources of information about the enemy and warn their own forces and their superior headquarters of any danger that is threatened.

Spetsnaz is one of the forms of Soviet military *razvedka* which occupies a place somewhere between reconnaissance and intelligence.

It is the name given to the shock troops of *razvedka* in which there are combined elements of espionage, terrorism and large-scale partisan operations. In personal terms, this covers a very diverse range of people: secret agents recruited by Soviet military *razvedka* among foreigners for carrying out espionage and terrorist operations; professional units composed of the country's best sportsmen; and units made up of ordinary but carefully selected and well-trained soldiers. The higher the level of a given headquarters is, the more *spetsnaz* units it has at its disposal and the more professionals there are among the *spetsnaz* troops.

The term *spetsnaz* is a composite word made up from *spetsialnoye nazhacheniye*, meaning 'special purpose'. The name is well chosen. *Spetsnaz* differs from other forms of *razvedka* in that it not only seeks and finds important enemy targets, but in the majority of cases attacks and destroys them.

Spetsnaz has a long history, in which there have been periods of success and periods of decline. After the Second World War *spetsnaz* was in the doldrums, but from the mid-1950s a new era in the history of the organisation began with the West's new deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. This development created for the Soviet Army, which had always prepared itself, and still does, only for 'liberation' wars on foreign territory, a practically insuperable barrier. Soviet strategy could continue along the same lines *only* if the means could be found to remove Western tactical nuclear weapons from the path of the Soviet troops, without at the same time turning the enemy's territory into a nuclear desert.

The destruction of the tactical nuclear weapons which render Soviet aggression impossible or pointless could be carried out only if the whereabouts of all, or at least the majority, of the enemy's tactical nuclear weapons were established. But this in itself presented a tremendous problem. It is very easy to conceal tactical missiles, aircraft and nuclear artillery and, instead of deploying real missiles and guns, the enemy can deploy dummies, thus diverting the attention of Soviet *razvedka* and protecting the real tactical nuclear weapons under cover.

The Soviet high command therefore had to devise the sort of means of detection that could approach very close to the enemy's weapons and in each case provide a precise answer to the question of whether they were real, or just well-produced dummies. But

even if a tremendous number of nuclear batteries were discovered in good time, that did not solve the problem. In the time it takes for the transmission of the reports from the reconnaissance units to the headquarters, for the analysis of the information obtained and the preparation of the appropriate command for action, the battery can have changed position several times. So forces had to be created that would be able to seek out, find and destroy immediately the nuclear weapons discovered in the course of war or immediately before its outbreak.

Spetsnaz was, and is, precisely such an instrument, permitting commanding officers at army level and higher to establish independently the whereabouts of the enemy's most dangerous weapons and to destroy them on the spot.

Is it possible for *spetsnaz* to pinpoint and destroy every single one of the enemy's nuclear weapons? Of course not. So what is the solution to this problem? It is very simple. *Spetsnaz* has to make every effort to find and destroy the enemy's nuclear armament. Nuclear strength represents the teeth of the state and it has to be knocked out with the first blow, possibly even before the fighting begins. But if it proves impossible to knock out all the teeth with the first blow, then a blow has to be struck not just at the teeth but at the brain and nervous system of the state.

When we speak of the 'brain' we mean the country's most important statesmen and politicians. In this context the leaders of the opposition parties are regarded as equally important candidates for destruction as the leaders of the party in power. The opposition is simply the state's reserve brain, and it would be silly to destroy the main decision-making system without putting the reserve system out of action. By the same token we mean, for example, the principal military leaders and police chiefs, the heads of the Church and trade unions and in general all the people who might at a critical moment appeal to the nation and who are well known to the nation.

By the 'nervous system' of the state we mean the principal centres and lines of government and military communications, and the commercial communications companies, including the main radio stations and television studios.

It would hardly be possible, of course, to destroy the brain, the nervous system and the teeth at once, but a simultaneous blow at all three of the most important organs could, in the opinion of the

Soviet leaders, substantially reduce a nation's capacity for action in the event of war, especially at its initial and most critical stage. Some missiles will be destroyed and others will not be fired because there will be nobody to give the appropriate command or because the command will not be passed on in time due to the breakdown of communications.

Having within its sphere an organisation like *spetsnaz*, and having tested its potential on numerous exercises, the Soviet high command came to the conclusion that *spetsnaz* could be used with success not only against tactical but also against strategic nuclear installations: submarine bases, weapon stockpiles, aircraft bases and missile launching sites.

Spetsnaz could be used too, they realised, against the heart and blood supply of the state: ie. its source and distribution of energy – power stations, transformer stations and power lines, as well as oil and gas pipelines and storage points, pumping station and oil refineries. Putting even a few of the enemy's more important power stations out of action could present him with a catastrophic situation. Not only would there be no light: factories would be brought to a standstill, lifts would cease to work, the refrigeration installations would be useless, hospitals would find it almost impossible to function, blood stored in refrigerators would begin to coagulate, traffic lights, petrol pumps and trains would come to a halt, computers would cease to operate.

Even this short list must lead to the conclusion that Soviet military *razvedka* (the GRU) and its integral *spetsnaz* is something more than the 'eyes and ears of the Soviet Army'. As a special branch of the GRU *spetsnaz* is intended primarily for action in time of war and in the very last days and hours before it breaks out. But *spetsnaz* is not idle in peacetime either. I am sometimes asked: if we are talking about terrorism on such a scale, we must be talking about the KGB. Not so. There are three good reasons why *spetsnaz* is a part of the GRU and not of the KGB. The first is that if the GRU and *spetsnaz* were to be removed from the Soviet Army and handed over to the KGB, it would be equivalent to blindfolding a strong man, while plugging his ears and depriving him of some other important organs, and making him fight with the information he needs for fighting provided by another person standing beside him and telling him the moves. The Soviet leaders have tried on more than one occasion to do this and it has always

ended in catastrophe. The information provided by the secret police was always imprecise, late and insufficient, and the actions of a blind giant, predictably, were neither accurate or effective.

Secondly, if the functions of the GRU and *spetsnaz* were to be handed over to the KGB, then in the event of a catastrophe (inevitable in such a situation) any Soviet commanding officer or chief of staff could say that he had not had sufficient information about the enemy, that for example a vital aerodrome and a missile battery nearby had not been destroyed by the KGB's forces. These would be perfectly justified complaints, although it is in any case impossible to destroy every aerodrome, every missile battery and every command post because the supply of information in the course of battle is always insufficient. Any commanding officer who receives information about the enemy can think of a million supplementary questions to which there is no answer. There is only one way out of the situation, and that is to make every commanding officer responsible for gathering his own information about the enemy and to provide him with all the means for defeating his own enemy. Then, if the information is insufficient or some targets have not been destroyed, only he and his chief of staff are to blame. They must themselves organise the collection and interpretation of information about the enemy, so as to have, if not all the information, at least the most essential information at the right time. They must organise the operation of their forces so as to destroy the most important obstacles which the enemy has put in the way of their advance. This is the only way to ensure victory. The Soviet political leadership, the KGB and the military leaders have all had every opportunity to convince themselves that there is no other.

Thirdly, the Soviet secret police, the KGB, carries out different functions and has other priorities. It has its own terrorist apparatus, which includes an organisation very similar to *spetsnaz*, known as *osnaz*. The KGB uses *osnaz* for carrying out a range of tasks not dissimilar in many cases to those performed by the GRU's *spetsnaz*. But the Soviet leaders consider that it is best not to have any monopolies in the field of secret warfare. Competition, they feel, gives far better results than cooperation.

Osnaz is not a subject I propose to deal with in this book. Only a KGB officer directly connected with *osnaz* could describe what it is. My knowledge is very limited. But just as a book about Stalin

would not be complete without some reference to Hitler, *osnaz* should not be overlooked here.

The term *osnaz* is usually met only in secret documents. In unclassified documents the term is written out in full as *osobogo nazhacheniya* or else reduced to the two letters 'ON'. In cases where a longer title is abbreviated the letters ON are run together with the preceding letters. For example, DON means 'division of *osnaz*', OON means a 'detachment of *osnaz*'.

The two words *osoby* and *spetsialny* are close in meaning but quite different words. In translation it is difficult to find a precise equivalent for these two words, which is why it is easier to use the terms *osnaz* and *spetsnaz* without translating them. *Osnaz* apparently came into being practically at the same time as the Communist dictatorship. In the very first moments of the existence of the Soviet regime we find references to detachments *osobogo nazhacheniya* – special purpose detachments. *Osnaz* means military-terrorist units which came into being as shock troops of the Communist Party whose job was to defend the party. *Osnaz* was later handed over to the secret police, which changed its own name from time to time as easily as a snake changes its skin: Cheka – VCheka – OGPU – NKVD – NKGB – MGB – MVD – KGB. Once a snake, however, always a snake.

It is the fact that *spetsnaz* belongs to the army, and *osnaz* to the secret police, that accounts for all the differences between them. *Spetsnaz* operates mainly against external enemies; *osnaz* does the same but mainly in its own territory and against its own citizens. Even if both *spetsnaz* and *osnaz* are faced with carrying out one and the same operation the Soviet leadership is not inclined to rely so much on co-operation between the army and the secret police as on the strong competitive instincts between them.

Chapter 3
A History of *Spetsnaz*

In order to grasp the history behind *spetsnaz* it is useful to cast our minds back to the British Parliament in the time of Henry VIII. In 1516 a Member of the Parliament, Thomas More, published an excellent book entitled *Utopia*. In it he showed, simply and persuasively, that it was very easy to create a society in which universal justice reigned, but that the consequences of doing so would be terrible. More describes a society in which there is no private property and in which everything is controlled by the state. The state of Utopia is completely isolated from the outside world, as completely as the bureaucratic class rules the population. The supreme ruler is installed for his lifetime. The country itself, once a peninsula, has after monumental efforts on the part of the population and the army to build a deep canal dividing it from the rest of the world, become an island. Slavery has been introduced, but the rest of the population live no better than slaves. People do not have their own homes, with the result that anybody can at any time go into any home he wishes, a system which is worse even than the regulations in the Soviet Army today, in which the barracks of each company are open only to soldiers of that company.

In fact the system in Utopia begins to look more like that in a Soviet concentration camp. In Utopia, of course, it is laid down when people are to rise (at four o'clock in the morning), when they are to go to bed and how many minutes' rest they may have. Every

day starts with public lectures. People must travel on a group passport, signed by the Mayor, and if they are caught without a passport outside their own district they are severely punished as deserters. Everybody keeps a close watch on his neighbour: 'Everyone has his eye on you.'

With fine English humour Thomas More describes the ways in which Utopia wages war. The whole population of Utopia, men and women, are trained to fight. Utopia wages only just wars in self-defence and, of course, for the liberation of other peoples. The people of Utopia consider it their right and their duty to establish a similarly just regime in neighbouring countries. Many of the surrounding countries have already been liberated and are now ruled, not by local leaders, but by administrators from Utopia. The liberation of the other peoples is carried out in the name of humanism. But Thomas More does not explain to us what this 'humanism' is. Utopia's allies, in receipt of military aid from her, turn the populations of the neighbouring states into slaves.

Utopia provokes conflicts and contradictions in the countries which have not yet been liberated. If someone in such a country speaks out in favour of capitulating to Utopia he can expect a big reward later. But anyone who calls upon the people to fight Utopia can expect only slavery or death, with his property split up and distributed to those who capitulate and collaborate.

On the outbreak of war Utopia's agents in the enemy country post up in prominent places announcements concerning the reward to be paid to anyone killing the king. It is a tremendous sum of money. There is also a list of other people for whose murder large sums of money will be paid.

The direct result of these measures is that universal suspicion reigns in the enemy country.

Thomas More describes only one of the strategems employed, but it is the most important:

> When the battle is at its height a group of specially selected young men, who have sworn to stick together, try to knock out the enemy general. They keep hammering away at him by every possible method – frontal attacks, ambushes, long-range archery, hand-to-hand combat. They bear down on him in a long, unbroken wedge-formation, the point of which is con-

stantly renewed as tired men are replaced by fresh ones. As a result the general is nearly always killed or taken prisoner – unless he saves his skin by running away.

It is the groups of 'specially selected young men' that I want to discuss in this book.

■ ■ ■

Four hundred years after the appearance of *Utopia* the frightful predictions of that wise Englishman became a reality in Russia. A successful attempt was made to create a society of universal justice. I had read Thomas More's frightening forecasts when I was still a child and I was amazed at the staggering realism with which Utopia was described and how strikingly similar it was to the Soviet Union: a place where all the towns looked like each other, people knew nothing about what was happening abroad or about fashion in clothes (everybody being dressed more or less the same), and so forth. More even described the situation of people 'who think differently'. In Utopia, he said, 'It is illegal for any such person to argue in defence of his beliefs.'

The Soviet Union is actually a very mild version of Utopia – a sort of 'Utopia with a human face'. A person can travel in the Soviet Union without having an internal passport, and Soviet bureaucrats do not yet have such power over the family as their Utopia counterparts who added up the number of men and women in each household and, if they exceeded the number permitted, simply transferred the superfluous members to another house or even another town where there was a shortage of them.

The Communists genuinely have a great deal left to do before they bring society down to the level of Utopia. But much has already been done, especially in the military sphere, and in particular in the creation of 'specially selected groups of young men'.

It is interesting to note that such groups were formed even before the Red Army existed, before the Red Guard, and even before the Revolution. The origins of *spetsnaz* are to be found in the revolutionary terrorism of the nineteenth century, when numerous groups of young people were ready to commit murder, or possibly suicide, in the cause of creating a society in which everything would be divided equally between everybody. As they

went about murdering others or getting killed themselves they failed to understand one simple truth: that in order to create a just society you had to create a control mechanism. The juster the society one wants to build the more complete must be the control over production and consumption.

Many of the first leaders of the Red Army had been terrorists in the past, before the Revolution. For example, one of the outstanding organisers of the Red Army, Mikhail Frunze, after whom the principal Soviet military academy is named, had twice been sentenced to death before the Revolution. At the time it was by no means easy to get two death sentences. For organising a party which aimed at the overthrow of the existing regime by force, Lenin received only three years of deportation in which he lived well and comfortably and spent his time shooting, fishing and openly preaching revolution. And the woman terrorist Vera Zasulich, who murdered a provincial governor was acquitted by a Russian court. The court was independent of the state and reckoned that, if she had killed for political reasons, it meant that she had been prompted by her conscience and her beliefs and that her acts could not be regarded as a crime. In this climate Mikhail Frunze had managed to receive two death sentences. Neither of them was carried out, naturally. On both occasions the sentence was commuted to deportation, from which he had no great difficulty in escaping. It was while he was in exile that Frunze organised a circle of like-minded people which was called the 'Military Academy': a real school for terrorists, which drew up the first strategy to be followed up by armed detachments of Communists in the event of an uprising.

The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks demonstrated, primarily to the revolutionaries themselves, that it was possible to neutralise a vast country and then to bring it under control simply and quickly. What was needed were 'groups of specially selected young men' capable of putting out of action the government, the postal services, the telegraph and telephone, and the railway terminals and bridges in the capital. Paralysis at the centre meant that counteraction on the outskirts was split up. Outlying areas could be dealt with later one at a time.

Frunze was undoubtedly a brilliant theoretician and practician of the art of war, including partisan warfare and terrorism. During the Civil War he commanded an army and a number of fronts.

After Trotsky's dismissal he took over as People's Commissar for military and naval affairs. During the war he reorganised the large but badly led partisan formations into regular divisions and armies which were subordinated to the strict centralised administration. At the same time, while commanding those formations, he kept sending relatively small but very reliable mobile units to fight in the enemy's rear.

The Civil War was fought over vast areas, a war of movement without a continuous stable front and with an enormous number of all sorts of armies, groups, independent detachments and bands. It was a partisan war in spirit and in content. Armies developed out of small, scattered detachments, and whenever they were defeated they were able to disintegrate into a large number of independent units which carried on the war on a partisan scale.

But we are not concerned here with the partisan war as a whole, only with the fighting units of the regular Red Army specially created for operating in the enemy's rear. Such units existed on various fronts and armies. They were not known as *spetsnaz*, but this did not alter their essential nature, and it was not just Frunze who appreciated the importance of being able to use regular units in the rear of the enemy. Trotsky, Stalin, Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, *inter alia*, supported the strategy and made extensive use of it.

Revolutionary war against the capitalist powers started immediately after the Bolsheviks seized power. As the Red Army 'liberated' fresh territory and arrived at the frontiers with other countries the amount of subversion directed against them increased. The end of the Civil War did not mean the end of the secret war being waged by the Communists against their neighbours. On the contrary, it was stepped up, because, once the Civil War was over, forces were released for other kinds of warfare.

Germany was the first target for revolution. It is interesting to recall that, as early as December 1917, a Communist newspaper *Die Fackel*, was being published in Petrograd with a circulation of 500,000 copies. In January 1918 a Communist group called 'Spartak' emerged in the same place. In April 1918 another newspaper *Die Weltrevolution*, began to appear. And finally, in August 1919, the famous paper of the German Communists, *Die Rote Fahne*, was founded in Moscow.

At the same time as the first Communist groups appeared, steps

were taken to train terrorist fighting units of German Communists. These units were used for suppressing the anti-Communist resistance put up by Russian and Ukrainian peasants. Then, in 1920, all the units of German Communists were gathered together in the rear of the Red Army on the Western front. That was when the Red Army was preparing for a breakthrough across Poland and into Germany. The Red Army's official marching song, 'Budenny's March', included these words: 'We're taking Warsaw – Take Berlin too!'

In that year the Bolsheviks did not succeed in organising revolution in Germany or even in 'liberating' Poland. At the time Soviet Russia was devastated by the First World War and by the far more terrible Civil War. Famine, typhus and destruction raged across the country. But in 1923 another attempt was made to provoke a revolution in Germany. Trotsky himself demanded in September 1923 to be relieved of all his Party and Government posts and to be sent as an ordinary soldier to the barricades of the German Revolution. The party did not send Trotsky there, but sent other Soviet Communist leaders, among them, Iosef Unshlikht. At the time he was deputy chairman of the Cheka secret police. Now he was appointed deputy head of the 'registration administration', now known as the GRU or military intelligence, and it was in this position that he was sent illegally to Germany. 'Unshlikht was given the task of organising the detachments which were to carry out the armed uprising and coup d'état, recruiting them and providing them with weapons. He also had the job of organising a German Cheka for the extermination of the bourgeoisie and opponents of the Revolution after the transfer of power. . . . This was how the planned Revolution was planned to take place. On the occasion of the anniversary of the Russian October Revolution the working masses were to come out on the streets for mass demonstrations. Unshlikht's "Red hundreds" were to provoke clashes with the police so as to cause bloodshed and more serious conflicts, to inflame the workers' indignation and carry out a general working-class uprising.'[1]

In view of the instability of German society at that time, the absence of a powerful army, the widespread discontent and the

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[1]B. Bazhanov: 'Memoirs of a Secretary to Stalin', pub. *Tretya volna* 1980, pp 67–69.

frequent outbursts of violence, especially in 1923, the plan might have been realised. Many experts are inclined to the view that Germany really was close to revolution. Soviet military intelligence and its terrorist units led by Unshlikht were expected to do no more than put the spark to the powder keg.

There were many reasons why the plans came to nothing. But there were two especially important ones: the absence of a common frontier between the USSR and Germany, and the split in the German Communist Party. The lack of a common frontier was at the time a serious obstacle to the penetration into Germany of substantial forces of Soviet subversives. Stalin understood this very well, and he was always fighting to have Poland crushed so that common frontiers could be established with Germany. When he succeeded in doing this in 1939, it was a risky step, since a common frontier with Germany meant that Germany could attack the USSR without warning, as indeed happened two years later. But without a common frontier Stalin could not get into Europe.

The split in the German Communist Party was an equally serious hindrance to the carrying out of Soviet plans. One group pursued policy, subservient to the Comintern and consequently to the Soviet Politburo, while the other pursued an antagonistic one. Zinoviev was 'extremely displeased by this and he raised the question in the Politburo of presenting Maslov [one of the dissenting German Communist leaders] with an ultimatum: either he would take a large sum of money, leave the party and get out of Germany, or Unshlikht would be given orders to liquidate him.'[1]

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At the same time as preparations were being made for revolution in Germany preparations were also going ahead for revolutions in other countries. For example, in September 1923, groups of terrorists trained in the USSR (of both Bulgarian and Soviet nationality) started causing disturbances in Bulgaria which could very well have developed into a state of general chaos and bloodletting. But the 'revolution' was suppressed and its ringleaders escaped to the Soviet Union. Eighteen months later, in April 1925, the attempt was repeated. This time unknown persons caused a

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[1] *Ibid.* p. 68.

tremendous explosion in the main cathedral in Sofia in the hope of killing the king and the whole government. Boris III had a miraculous escape, but attempts to destabilise Bulgaria by acts of terrorism continued until 1944, when the Red Army at last entered Bulgaria. Another miracle then seemed to take place, because from that moment on nobody has tried to shoot the Bulgarian rulers and no one has let off any bombs. The terror did continue, but it was aimed at the population of the country as a whole rather than the rulers. And then Bulgarian terrorism spread beyond the frontiers of the country and appeared on the streets of Western Europe.

The campaign of terrorism against Finland is closely linked with the name of the Finnish Communist Otto Kuusinen who was one of the leaders of the Communist revolt in Finland in 1918. After the defeat of the 'revolution' he escaped to Moscow and later returned to Finland for underground work. In 1921 he again fled to Moscow to save himself from arrest. From that moment Kuusinen's career was closely linked with Soviet military intelligence officers. Kuusinen had an official post and did the same work: preparing for the overthrow of democracy in Finland and other countries. In his secret career Kuusinen had some notable successes. In the mid-1930s he rose to be deputy head of *Razvedupr* as the GRU was known then. Under Kuusinen's direction an effective espionage network was organised in the Scandinavian countries, and at the same time he directed the training of military units which were to carry out acts of terrorism in those countries. As early as the summer of 1918 an officer school was founded in Petrograd to train men for the 'Red Army of Finland'. This school later trained officers for other 'Red Armies' and became the International Military School – an institute of higher education for terrorists.

After the Civil War was over Kuusinen insisted on carrying on underground warfare on Finnish territory and keeping the best units of Finnish Communists in existence. In 1939, after the Red Army invaded Finland, he proclaimed himself 'prime minister and minister of foreign affairs' of the 'Finnish Democratic Republic'. The 'government' included Mauri Rosenberg (from the GRU) as 'deputy prime minister', Axel Antila as 'minister of defence' and the NKVD interrogator Tuure Lekhen as 'minister of internal affairs'. But the Finnish people put up such resistance that the

Kuusinen government's bid to turn Finland into a 'people's republic' was a failure.

(A curious fact of history must be mentioned here. When the Finnish Communists formed their government on Soviet territory and started a war against their own country, voluntary formations of Russians were formed in Finland which went into battle against both the Soviet and the Finnish Communists. A notable member of these genuinely voluntary units was Boris Bazhanov, formerly Stalin's personal secretary, who had fled to the West.)

Otto Kuusinen's unsuccessful attempt to become the ruler of Communist Finland did not bring his career to an end. He continued it with success, first in the GRU and later in the Department of Administrative Organs of the Central Committee of the CPSU – the body that supervises all the espionage and terrorist institutions in the Soviet Union, as well as the prisons, concentration camps, courts and so forth. From 1957 until his death in 1964 Kuusinen was one of the most powerful leaders in the Soviet Union, serving simultaneously as a member of the Politburo and a Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party. In the Khodynki district of Moscow, where the GRU has its headquarters, one of the bigger streets is called Otto Kuusinen Street.

In the course of the Civil War and after it, Polish units, too, were formed and went into action on Soviet territory. One example was the 1st Revolutionary Regiment, 'Red Warsaw', which was used for putting down anti-Communist revolts in Moscow, Tambov and Yaroslav. For suppressing anti-Communist revolts by the Russian population the Communists used a Yugoslav regiment, a Czechoslovak regiment, and many other formations, including Hungarians, Rumanians, Austrians and others. After the Civil War all these formations provided a base for the recruitment of spies and for setting up subversive combat detachments for operating on the territory of capitalist states. For example, a group of Hungarian Communist terrorists led by Ferenc Kryug, fought against Russian peasants in the Civil War; in the Second World War Kryug led a special purpose group operating in Hungary.

Apart from the 'internationalist' fighters, i.e. people of foreign extraction, detachments were organised in the Soviet Union for operating abroad which were composed entirely, or very largely, of Soviet citizens. A bitter battle was fought between the army commanders and the secret police for control of these detachments.

On 2 August 1930 a small detachment of commando troops was dropped in the region of Voronezh and was supposed during the manoeuvres to carry out operations in the rear of the 'enemy'. Officially this is the date when Soviet airborne troops came into being. But it is also the date when *spetsnaz* was born. Airborne troops and *spetsnaz* troops subsequently went through a parallel development. At certain points in its history *spetsnaz* passed out of the control of military intelligence into the hands of the airborne forces, at others the airborne troops exercised administrative control while military intelligence had operational control. But in the end it was reckoned to be more expedient to hand *spetsnaz* over entirely to military intelligence. The progress of *spetsnaz* over the following thirty years cannot be studied in isolation from the development of the airborne forces.

1930 marked the beginning of a serious preoccupation with parachute troops in the USSR. In 1931 separate detachments of parachutists were made into battalions and a little later into regiments. In 1933 an *osnaz* brigade was formed in the Leningrad military district. It included a battalion of parachutists, a battalion of mechanised infantry, a battalion of artillery and three squadrons of aircraft. However, it turned out to be of little use to the Army, because it was not only too large and too awkward to manage, but also under the authority of the NKVD rather than the GRU. After a long dispute this brigade and several others created on the same pattern were reorganised into airborne brigades and handed over entirely to the Army.

To begin with, the airborne forces or VDV consisted of transport aircraft, airborne regiments and brigades, squadrons of heavy bombers and separate reconnaissance units. It is these reconnaissance units that are of interest to us. How many there were of them and how many men they included is not known. There is fragmentary information about their tactics and training. But it is known, for example, that one of the training schools was situated in Kiev. It was a secret school and operated under the disguise of a parachute club, while being completely under the control of the *Razvedupr* (GRU). It included a lot of women. In the course of the numerous manoeuvres that were held, the reconnaissance units were dropped in the rear of the 'enemy' and made attacks on his command points, headquarters, centres and lines of communications. It is known that terrorist techniques

It was a magnificent defence system. Bearing in mind the vast territories involved and the poor network of roads, such a system could well have made the whole of Soviet territory practically impassable for an enemy. But – in 1939 the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was signed.

The Pact was the signal for a tremendous expansion of Soviet military strength. Everything connected with defence was destroyed, while everything connected with offensive actions was expanded at a great rate, particularly Soviet sabotage troops and the airborne troops connected with them. In April 1941 five airborne corps were formed. All five were in the first strategic echelon of the Red Army, three facing Germany and two facing Rumania. The latter were more dangerous for Germany than the other three, because the dropping of even one airborne corps in Rumania and the cutting off, even temporarily, of supplies of oil to Germany meant the end of the war for the Germans.

Five airborne corps in 1941 was more than there were in all the other countries of the world together. But this was not enough for Stalin. There was a plan to create another five airborne corps, and the plan was carried out in August and September 1941. But in a defensive war Stalin did not, of course, need either the first five or the second five. Any discussion of Stalin's 'defence plans' must first of all explain how five airborne corps, let alone ten, could be used in a defensive war.

In a war on one's own territory it is far easier during a temporary retreat to leave partisan forces or even complete fighting formations hidden on the ground than it is to drop them in later by parachute. But Stalin had destroyed such formations, from which one can draw only one conclusion; Stalin had prepared the airborne corps specifically for dropping on other people's territory.

At the same time as the rapid expansion of the airborne forces there was an equally rapid growth of the special reconnaissance units intended for operations on enemy territory.

The great British strategist and historian B. H. Liddell Hart, dealing with this period, speaks of Hitler's fears concerning Stalin's intentions, referring to 'a fatal attack in the back from Russia'.[1] And moves by the Soviet Union in June 1940 did evoke

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[1] *Strategy. The Indirect Approach.* p.241.

particular nervousness in the German high command. Germany had thrown all her forces against France at that time, and the Soviet Union rushed troops into the Baltic states and Bessarabia. The airborne troops especially distinguished themselves. In June 1940 the 214th Soviet airborne brigade was dropped with the idea of seizing a group of aerodromes in the region of Shaulyai in Lithuania, under a hundred kilometres from the East Prussian border. In the same month the 201st and 204th airborne brigades were dropped in Bessarabia to capture the towns of Ismail and Belgrad-Dnestrovsky. This was close by the Ploesti oilfields. What would Stalin do if the German Army advanced further into North Africa and the British Isles?

It is easy to understand why Hitler took the decision in that next month, July 1940, to prepare for war against the USSR. It was quite impossible for him to move off the continent of Europe and into the British Isles or Africa, leaving Stalin with his huge army and terrifying airborne forces which were of no use to him for anything but a large-scale offensive.

Hitler guessed rightly what Stalin's plans were, as is apparent from his letter to Mussolini of 21 June 1941.[1] Can we believe Hitler? In this case we probably can. The letter was not intended for publication and was never published in Hitler's lifetime. It is interesting in that it repeats the thought that Stalin had voiced at a secret meeting of the Central Committee. Moreover, in his speech at the 18th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Stalin had had this to say about Britain and France; 'In their policy of non-intervention can be detected an attempt and a desire not to prevent the aggressors from doing their dirty work . . . not to prevent, let us say, Germany getting bogged down in European affairs and involved in a war . . . to let all the participants in the war get stuck deep in the mud of battle, to encourage them to do this on the quiet, to let them weaken and exhaust each other, and then, when they are sufficiently weakened, to enter the arena with fresh forces, acting of course "in the interests of peace", and to dictate their own conditions to the crippled participants in the war.'[2] Once

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again, he was attributing to others motives which impelled him in his ambitions. Stalin wanted Europe to exhaust itself. And Hitler understood that. But he understood too late. He should have understood before the Pact was signed.

However, Hitler still managed to upset Stalin's plans by starting the war first. The huge Soviet forces intended for the 'liberation' of Russia's neighbours were quite unnecessary in the war of defence against Germany. The airborne corps were used as ordinary infantry against the advancing German tanks. The many units and groups of airborne troops and commandos were forced to retreat or to dig trenches to halt the advancing German troops. The airborne troops trained for operations in the territory of foreign countries were able to be used in the enemy's rear, but not in his territory so much as in Soviet territory occupied by the German army.

The reshaping of the whole philosophy of the Red Army, which had been taught to conduct an offensive war on other people's territory, was very painful but relatively short. Six months later the Red Army had learnt to defend itself and in another year it had gone over to offensive operations. From that moment everything fell into place and the Red Army, created only for offensive operations, became once again victorious.

The process of reorganising the armed forces for operations on its own territory affected all branches of the services, including the special forces. At the beginning of 1942 thirteen guards battalions[1] of *spetsnaz* were organised in the Red Army for operations in the enemy's rear, as well as one guards engineering brigade of *spetsnaz*, consisting of five battalions. The number of separate battalions corresponded exactly to the number of fighting fronts. Each front received one such battalion under its command. A guards brigade of *spetsnaz* remained at the disposal of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, to be used only with Stalin's personal permission in the most crucial locations.

So as not to reveal the real name of *spetsnaz*, the independent guards battalion and the brigade were given the code name of 'guards minelayers'. Only a very limited circle of people knew what the name concealed.

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[1]In the Soviet Army the title of 'guards' can be won only in battle, the only exceptions being certain formations which were awarded the title when they were being formed. These included *spetsnaz* detachments.

A special *razvedka* department was set up in the Intelligence directorate of each front to direct the work of the 'guards minelayers'. Each department had at its disposal a battalion of *spetsnaz*. Later the special *razvedka* departments began recruiting *spetsnaz* agents in territories occupied by the enemy. These agents were intended for providing support for the 'minelayers' when they appeared in the enemy rear. Subsequently each special *razvedka* department was provided with a reconnaissance point of *spetsnaz* to recruit agents.

The guards brigade of *spetsnaz* was headed by one of the outstanding Soviet practitioners of fighting in the rear of the enemy – Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Moshe Ioffe.

The number of *spetsnaz* increased very quickly. In unclassified Soviet writings we come across references to the 16th and the 33rd engineering brigade of *spetsnaz*. Apart from detachments operating behind the enemy's lines, other *spetsnaz* units were formed for different purposes: for example, radio battalions for destroying the enemy's radio links, spreading disinformation and tracing the whereabouts of enemy headquarters and communication centres so as to facilitate the work of the *spetsnaz* terrorist formations. It is known that from 1942 there existed the 130th, 131st, 132nd and 226th independent radio battalions of *spetsnaz*.

The operations carried out by the 'minelayers' were distinguished by their daring character and their effectiveness. They usually turned up behind the enemy's lines in small groups. Sometimes they operated independently, at others they combined their operations with the partisans. These joint operations always benefited both the partisans and *spetsnaz*. The minelayers taught the partisans the most difficult aspects of minelaying, the most complicated technology and the most advanced tactics. When they were with the partisans they had a reliable hiding place, protection while they carried out their operation, and medical and other aid in case of need. The partisans knew the area well and could serve as guides. It was an excellent combination: the local partisans who knew every tree in the forest, and the first-class technical equipment for the use of explosives demonstrated by real experts.

The 'guards minelayers' usually came on the scene for a short while, did their work swiftly and well and then returned whence they had come. The principal way of transporting them behind the enemy's lines was to drop them by parachute. Their return was

carried out by aircraft using secret partisan airfields, or they made their way by foot across the enemy's front line.

The high point in the partisan war against Germany consisted of two operations carried out in 1943. By that time, as a result of action by *osnaz*, order had been introduced into the partisan movement; it had been 'purged' and brought under rigid central control. As a result of *spetsnaz* work the partisan movement had been taught the latest methods of warfare and the most advanced techniques of sabotage.

The operation known as the 'War of the Rails' was carried out over six weeks from August to September 1943. It was a very fortunate time to have chosen. It was at that moment when the Soviet forces, having exhausted the German army in defensive battles at Kursk, themselves suddenly went over to the offensive. To support the advance a huge operation was undertaken in the rear of the enemy with the object of paralysing his supply routes, preventing him from bringing up ammunition and fuel for the troops, and making it impossible for him to move his reserves around. The operation involved the participation of 167 partisan units with a total strength of 100,000 men. All the units of *spetsnaz* were sent behind the enemy lines to help the partisans. More than 150 tons of explosives, more than 150 kilometres of wire and over half a million detonators were transported to the partisan units by air. The *spetsnaz* units were instructed to maintain a strict watch over the fulfilment of their tasks. Most of them operated independently in the most dangerous and important places, and they also appointed men from their units to instruct the partisan units in the use of explosives.

Operation 'War of the Rails' was carried out simultaneously in a territory with a front more than 1000 kilometres wide and more than 500 kilometres in depth. On the first night of the operation 42,000 explosions took place on the railway lines, and the partisan activity increased with every night that passed. The German high command threw in tremendous forces to defend their lines of communication, so that every night could be heard not only the sound of bridges and railway lines being blown up but also the sounds of battle with the German forces as the partisans fought their way through to whatever they had to destroy. Altogether, in the course of the operation 215,000 rails, 836 complete trains, 184 rail and 556 road bridges were blown up. A vast quantity of enemy equipment and ammunition was also destroyed.

Having won the enormous battle at Kursk, the Red Army sped towards the river Dnieper and crossed it in several places. A second large-scale operation in support of the advancing troops was carried out in the enemy's rear under the name of 'Concert', which was in concept and spirit a continuation of the 'War of the Rails'. In the final stage of that operation all the *spetsnaz* units were taken off to new areas and were enabled to rest along with the partisan formations which had not taken part in it. Now their time had come. Operation 'Concert' began on 19 September 1943. That night in Belorussia alone 19,903 rails were blown up. On the night of 25 September 15,809 rails were destroyed. All the *spetsnaz* units and 193 partisan units took part in the operation 'Concert'. The total number of participants in the operation exceeded 120,000. In the course of the whole operation, which went on until the end of October, 148,557 rails were destroyed, several hundred trains with troops, weapons and ammunition were derailed, and hundreds of bridges were blown up. Despite a shortage of explosives and other material needed for such work, on the eve of the operation only eighty tons of explosives could be sent to the partisans. Nevertheless 'Concert' was a tremendous success.

After the Red Army moved into the territory of neighbouring states *spetsnaz* went through a radical reorganisation. The independent reconnaissance units, the reconnaissance posts which recruited agents for terrorist actions, and the independent radio battalions for conducting disinformation, were all retained in their entirety. There are plenty of references in the Soviet military press to operations by special intelligence units in the final stages of the war. For example, in the course of an operation in the Vistula-Oder area special groups from the Intelligence directorate of the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front established the scope of the network of aerodromes and the exact position of the enemy's air bases, found the headquarters of the 4th Tank Army and the 17th Army, the 48th Tank Corps and the 42nd Army Corps, and also gathered a great deal of other very necessary information.

The detachments of 'guards minelayers' of *spetsnaz* were reformed, however, into regular guards sapper detachments and were used in that form until the end of the war. Only a relatively small number of 'guards minelayers' were kept in being and used behind the enemy lines in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Such a decision was absolutely right for the times. The main

targets for *spetsnaz* operations had been the enemy's lines of communication. But that had been before the Red Army had started to advance at great speed. When that happened, there was no longer any need to blow up bridges. They needed to be captured and preserved, not destroyed. For this work the Red Army had separate shock brigades of motorised guards engineering troops which, operating jointly with the forward units, would capture especially important buildings and other objects, clear them of mines and defend them until the main force arrived. The guards formations of *spetsnaz* were used mainly for strengthening these special engineering brigades. Some of the surviving guards battalions of *spetsnaz* were transferred to the Far East where, in August 1945, they were used against the Japanese Army.

The use of *spetsnaz* in the Manchurian offensive of 1945 is of special interest, because it provides the best illustration of what was supposed to happen to Germany if she had not attacked the USSR.

Japan had a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. But Japan had gone to war with other states and had exhausted her military, economic and other resources. Japan had seized vast territories inhabited by hundreds of millions of people who wanted to be liberated and were ready to welcome and support any liberator who came along. Japan was in exactly the situation in which Stalin had wanted to see Germany: exhausted by war with other countries, and with troops scattered over expansive territories the populations of which hated the sight of them.

Thus, in the interests naturally of peace and humanity Stalin struck a sudden crushing blow at the armed forces of Japan in Manchuria and China, violating the treaty signed four years earlier. The operation took place over vast areas. In terms of the distances covered and the speed at which it moved, this operation has no equal in world history. Soviet troops operated over territories 5000 kilometres in width and 600–800 kilometres in depth. More than a million and a half soldiers took part in the operation, with over 5000 tanks and nearly 4000 aircraft. It really was a lightning operation, in the course of which 84,000 Japanese officers and men were killed and 593,000 taken prisoner. A tremendous quantity of arms, ammunition and other equipment was seized.

It may be objected that Japan was already on the brink of catastrophe. That is true. But therein lies Soviet strategy: to

remain neutral until such time as the enemy exhausts himself in battle against someone else, and then to strike a sudden blow. That is precisely how the war against Germany was planned and that was why the partisan units, the barriers and defensive installations were all dispensed with, and why the ten airborne corps were created in 1941.

In the Manchurian offensive the *spetsnaz* detachments put up their best performance. Twenty airborne landings were made not by airborne troops, but by special reconnaissance troops. *Spetsnaz* units of the Pacific Fleet were landed from submarines and surface boats. Some *spetsnaz* units crossed the frontier by foot, captured Japanese cars and used them for their operations. Worried about the railway tunnels on a strip of the 1st Far Eastern front, the Soviet high command created special units for capturing the tunnels. The groups crossed the frontier secretly, cut the throats of the guards, severed the wires connected to the explosive charges, and put the detonators out of action. They then held the tunnels until their own forces arrived.

In the course of the offensive a new and very risky type of operation was employed by *spetsnaz*. Senior GRU officers, with the rank of colonel or even major-general, were put in charge of small groups. Such a group would suddenly land on an airfield close to an important Japanese headquarters. The appearance of a Soviet colonel or general deep in the Japanese rear never failed to provoke astonished reactions from both the Japanese high command and the Japanese troops, as well as from the local population. The transport planes carrying these were escorted by Soviet fighter aircraft, but the fighters were soon obliged to return to their bases, leaving the Soviet transport undefended until it landed. Even after it landed it had at best only one high-ranking officer, the crew and no more than a platoon of soldiers to guard over the plane. The Soviet officer would demand and usually obtain a meeting with a Japanese general, at which he would demand the surrender of the Japanese garrison. He and his group really had nothing to back them up: Soviet troops were still hundreds of kilometres away and it was still weeks to the end of the war. But the local Japanese military leaders (and the Soviet officers too, for that matter) naturally did not realise this. Perhaps the Emperor had decided to fight on to the last man. . . .

In several recorded instances, senior Japanese military leaders

decided independently to surrender without having permission to do so from their superiors. The improvement in the morale and position of the Soviet troops can be imagined.

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After the end of the Second World War *spetsnaz* practically ceased to exist for several years. Its reorganisation was eventually carried out under the direction of several generals who were fanatically devoted to the idea of *spetsnaz*. One of them was Viktor Kondratevich Kharchenko, who is quite rightly regarded as the 'father' of the modern *spetsnaz*. Kharchenko was an outstanding sportsman and expert in the theory and practice of the use of explosives. In 1938 he graduated from the military electrotechnical academy which, apart from training specialists in communications, at that time also produced experts in the business of applying the most complicated way of blowing up buildings and other objectives. During the war he was chief of staff of the directorate of special works on the Western front. From May 1942 he was chief of staff on the independent guards *spetsnaz* brigade, and from June he was deputy commander of that brigade. In July 1944 his brigade was reorganised into an independent guards motorised engineering brigade.

Kharchenko was working in the General Staff after the war when he wrote a letter to Stalin, the basic point of which was: 'If before the outbreak of war our sportsmen who made up the *spetsnaz* units spent some time in Germany, Finland, Poland and other countries, they could be used in wartime in enemy territory with greater likelihood of success.' Many specialists in the Soviet Union now believe that Stalin put an end to the Soviet Union's self-imposed isolation in sport partly because of the effect Kharchenko's letter had on him.

In 1948 Kharchenko completed his studies at the Academy of the General Staff. From 1951 he headed the scientific research institute of the engineering troops. Under his direction major researches and experiments were carried out in an effort to develop new engineering equipment and armaments, especially for small detachments of saboteurs operating behind the enemy's lines.

In the immediate postwar years Kharchenko strove to demonstrate at the very highest level the necessity for reconstructing

spetsnaz on a new technical level. He had a great many opponents. So then he decided not to argue any more. He selected a group of sportsmen from among the students at the engineering academy, succeeded in interesting them in his idea, and trained them personally for carrying out very difficult tasks. During manoeuvres held at the Totskyie camps, when on Marshal Zhukov's instructions a real nuclear explosion was carried out, and then the behaviour of the troops in conditions extremely close to real warfare was studied, Kharchenko decided to deploy his own group of men at his own risk.

The discussions that took place after the manoeuvres were, the senior officers all agreed, instructive – all except General Kharchenko. He pointed out that in circumstances of actual warfare nothing of what they had been discussing would have taken place because, he said, a small group of trained people had been close to where the nuclear charges had been stored and had had every opportunity to destroy the transport when the charges were being moved from the store to the airfield. Moreover, he said, the officers who took the decision to use nuclear weapons could easily have been killed before they took the decision. Kharchenko produced proof in support of his statements. When this produced no magic results, Kharchenko repeated his 'act' at other major manoeuvres until his persistence paid off. Eventually he obtained permission to form a battalion for operations in the enemy's rear directed at his nuclear weapons and his command posts.

The battalion operated very successfully, and that was the beginning of the resurrection of *spetsnaz*. All the contemporary formations of *spetsnaz* have been created anew. That is why, unlike those which existed during the war, they are not honoured with the title of 'guards' units.[1]

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[1]Kharchenko himself moved steadily up the promotion ladder. From 1961 he was deputy to the Chief of Engineering troops and from February 1965 he was head of the same service. In 1972 he was promoted to Marshal of engineering troops. Having attained such heights, however, Kharchenko did not forget his creation, and he was a frequent guest in the 'Olympic Village', the main *spetsnaz* training centre near Kirovograd. When he was killed in 1975 during the testing of a new weapon, his citations used the highest peacetime formula 'killed in the course of carrying out his official duties', which is very seldom met with in reference to this senior category of Soviet officers.

Chapter 4
The Fighting Units of *Spetsnaz*

Spetsnaz is made up of three distinct elements: the fighting units, the units of professional sportsmen and the network of secret agents. In numerical terms the fighting units of *spetsnaz* are the largest. They are composed of soldiers from the ranks, out of those who are especially strong, especially tough and especially loyal.

A factor that facilitates the selection process is that within the Soviet Army there exists a hidden system for the selection of soldiers. Long before they put on a military uniform, the millions of recruits are carefully screened and divided into categories in accordance with their political reliability, their physical and mental development, the extent of their political involvement, and the 'cleanliness' (from the Communist point of view) of their personal and family record. The Soviet soldier does not know to which category he belongs, and in fact he knows nothing about the existence of the various categories. If a soldier is included in a higher category than his comrades that does not necessarily mean that he is fortunate. On the contrary, the best thing for a soldier is to be put into the lowest category and to perform his two years of military service in some remote and God-forsaken pioneer battalion in which there is neither discipline nor supervision, or in units of which the officers have long since drunk away all the authority

they had. The higher the category the soldier is put into the more difficult his military service will be.

Soldiers of the highest category make up the Kremlin guard, the troops protecting the government communications, the frontier troops of the KGB and *spetsnaz*. Being included in the highest category does not necessarily mean being posted to the Kremlin, to a *spetsnaz* brigade or to a government communications centre. The highest-category men selected by the local military authorities simply represent the best human material which is offered to the 'customer' for him to choose from. The 'customer' selects only what suits his need. All those who do not appeal to the customers move down to a lower level and are offered to representatives of the next echelon, that of the strategic missile troops, the airborne forces and crews of nuclear submarines.

The young soldier does not realise, of course, what is going on. He is simply summoned to a room where people he doesn't know ask him a lot of questions. A few days later he is called to the room again and finds a different set of strangers there who also ask him questions.

This system of sorting out recruits reminds one of the system of closed shops for leading comrades. The highest official has the first choice. Then his deputy can go to the shop and choose something from what remains. Then lower ranking officials are allowed into the shop, then their deputies, and so on. In this system *spetsnaz* rank as the very highest category.

The soldiers who have been picked out by *spetsnaz* officers are gathered together into groups and are convoyed by officers and sergeants to fighting units of *spetsnaz*, where they are formed into groups and go through an intensive course of training lasting several weeks. At the end of the course the soldier fires shots from his Kalashnikov automatic rifle for the first time and is then made to take the military oath. The best out of the group of young soldiers are then sent to a *spetsnaz* training unit from which they return six months later with the rank of sergeant, while the rest are posted to fighting units.

In *spetsnaz*, as throughout the Soviet Army, they observe the 'cult of the old soldier'. All soldiers are divided into *stariki* ('old men') and *salagi* ('small fry'). A real *salaga* is a soldier who has only just started his service. A really 'old man' (some twenty years' old) is one who is about to complete his service in a few

months. A man who is neither a real *starik* nor a real *salaga* falls between the two, a *starik* being compared to anyone who has done less time than he has, and a *salaga* to anyone who has served in the army a few months longer than he.

Having been recruited into *spetsnaz*, the soldier has to sign an undertaking not to disclose secret information. He has no right ever to tell anyone where he has served or what his service consisted of. At most he has the right to say he served with the airborne corps. Disclosure of the secrets of *spetsnaz* is treated as high treason, punishable by death according to article 64 of the Soviet criminal code.

Once he has completed his two years' service in *spetsnaz* a soldier has three choices. He can become an officer, in which case he is offered special terms for entering the higher school for officers of the airborne forces in Ryazan. He can become a regular soldier in *spetsnaz*, for which he has to go through a number of supplementary courses. Or he has the option to join the reserve. If he chooses the last course he is regarded as being a member of the *spetsnaz* reserve and is with it for the next five years. Then, up to the age of thirty, he is part of the airborne reserve. After that he is considered to belong to the ordinary infantry reserve until he is fifty. Like any other reserve force, the existence of a *spetsnaz* reserve makes it possible at a time of mobilisation to multiply the size of the *spetsnaz* fighting units with reservists if necessary.

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Mud, nothing but mud all round, and it was pouring with rain. It had been raining throughout the summer, so that everything was wet and hanging limp. Everything was stuck in the mud. Every soldier's boot carried kilograms of it. But their bodies were covered in mud as well, and their hands and faces up to their ears and further. It was clear that the sergeant had not taken pity on the young *spetsnaz* recruits that day. They had been called up only a month before. They had been formed up into a provisional group and been put through a month's course for young soldiers which every one of them would remember all his life in his worst nightmare.

That morning they had been divided up into companies and platoons. Before letting them back into their mud-covered, sodden tent at the end of the day each sergeant had time to show his platoon the extent of his authority.

'Get inside!'

There were ten young men crowding around the entrance to a huge tent, as big as a prison barracks.

'Get inside, damn you!' The sergeant urged them on.

The first soldier thrust aside the heavy wet tarpaulin which served as a door and was about to enter when something stopped him. On the muddy, much trampled ground just inside the entrance a dazzlingly white towel had been laid down in place of a doormat. The soldier hesitated. But behind him the sergeant was pushing and shouting: 'Go on in, damn you!'

The soldier was not inclined to step on the towel. At the same time he couldn't make up his mind to jump over it, because the mud from his boots would inevitably land on the towel. Eventually he jumped, and the others jumped across the towel after him. For some reason no one dared to take the towel away. Everyone could see that there was some reason why it had been put there right in the entrance. A beautiful clean towel. With mud all around it. What was it doing there?

A whole platoon lived in one huge tent. The men slept in two-tier metal bunks. The top bunks were occupied by the *stariki* – the 'old men' of nineteen or even nineteen and a half, who had already served a year or even eighteen months in *spetsnaz*. The *salagi* slept on the bottom bunks. They had served only six months. By comparison with those who were now jumping over the towel they were of course *stariki* too. They had all in their day jumped awkwardly across the towel. Now they were watching silently, patiently and attentively to see how the new men behaved in that situation.

The new men behaved as anybody would in their situation. Some pushed from behind, and there was the towel in front. So they jumped, and clustered together in the centre of the tent, not knowing where to put their hands or where to look. It was strange. They seemed to want to look at the ground. All the young men behaved in exactly the same way: a jump, into the crowd and eyes down. But no – the last soldier behaved quite differently. He burst into the tent, helped by a kick from the sergeant. On seeing the white towel he pulled himself up sharply, stood on it in his dirty boots and proceeded to wipe them as if he really were standing on a doormat. Having wiped his feet he didn't join the crowd but marched to the far corner of the tent where he had seen a spare bed.

'Is this mine?'

'It's yours,' the platoon shouted approvingly. 'Come here, mate, there's a better place here! Do you want to eat?'

That night all the young recruits would get beaten. And they would be beaten on the following nights. They would be driven out into the mud barefoot, and they would be made to sleep in the lavatories (standing up or lying down, as you wish). They would be beaten with belts, with slippers and with spoons, with anything suitable for causing pain. The *stariki* would use the *salagi* on which to ride horseback in battles with their friends. The *salagi* would clean the 'old men's' weapons and do their dirty jobs for them. There would be the same goings-on as in the rest of the Soviet Army. *Stariki* everywhere play the same kind of tricks on the recruits. The rituals and the rules are the same everywhere. The *spetsnaz* differs from the other branches only in that they place the dazzlingly clean towel at the entrance to the tent for the recruits to walk over. The sense of this particular ritual is clear and simple: We are nice people. We welcome you, young man, cordially into our friendly collective. Our work is very hard, the hardest in the whole army, but we do not let it harden our hearts. Come into our house, young man, and make yourself at home. We respect you and will spare nothing for you. You see – we have even put the towel with which we wipe our faces for you to walk on in your dirty feet. So that's it, is it – you don't accept our welcome? You reject our modest gift? You don't even wish to wipe your boots on what we wipe our faces with! What sort of people do you take us for? You may certainly not respect us, but why did you come into our house with dirty boots?

Only one of the *salagi*, the one who wiped his feet on the towel, will be able to sleep undisturbed. He will receive his full ration of food and will clean only his own weapon; and perhaps the *stariki* will give instructions that he should not do even that. There are many others in the platoon to do it.

Where on earth could a young eighteen-year-old soldier have learnt about the *spetsnaz* tradition? Where could he have heard about the white towel? *Spetsnaz* is a secret organisation which treasures its traditions and keeps them to itself. A former *spetsnaz* soldier must never tell tales: he'll lose his tongue if he does. In any case he is unlikely to tell anyone about the towel trick, especially someone who has yet to be called up. I was beaten up, so let him be beaten up as well, he reasons.

There are only three possible ways the young soldier could have found out about the towel. Either he simply guessed what was happening himself. The towel had been laid down at the entrance, so it must be to wipe his feet on. What else could it be for? Or perhaps his elder brother had been through the *spetsnaz*. He had, of course, never called it by that name or said what it was for, but he might have said about the towel: 'Watch out, brother, there are some units that have very strange customs. . . . But just take care – if you let on I'll knock your head off. And I can.' Or his elder brother might have spent some time in a penal battalion. Perhaps he had been in *spetsnaz and* in a penal battalion. For the custom of laying out a towel in the entrance before the arrival of recruits did not originate in *spetsnaz* but in the penal battalions. It is possible that it was handed on to the present-day penal battalions from the prisons of the past.

The links between *spetsnaz* and the penal battalions are invisible, but they are many and very strong.

In the first place, service in *spetsnaz* is the toughest form of service in the Soviet Army. The physical and psychological demands are not only increased deliberately to the very highest point that a man can bear; they are frequently, and also deliberately, taken beyond any permissible limits. It is quite understandable that a *spetsnaz* soldier should find he cannot withstand these extreme demands and breaks down. The breakdown may take many different forms: suicide, severe depression, hysteria, madness or desertion. As I was leaving an intelligence unit of a military district on promotion to Moscow I suddenly came across, on a little railway station, a *spetsnaz* officer I knew being escorted by two armed soldiers.

'What on earth are you doing here?' I exclaimed. 'You don't see people on this station more than once in a month!'

'One of my men ran away!'

'A new recruit?'

'That's the trouble, he's a *starik*. Only another month to go.'

'Did he take his weapon?'

'No, he went without it.'

I expressed my surprise, wished the lieutenant luck and went on my way. How the search ended I do not know. At the very next station soldiers of the Interior Ministry's troops were searching the carriages. The alarm had gone out all over the district.

Men run away from *spetsnaz* more often than from other branches of the services. But it is usually a case of a new recruit who has been stretched to the limit and who usually takes a rifle with him. A man like that will kill anyone who gets in his path. But he is usually quickly run down and killed. But in this case it was a *starik* who had run off, and without a rifle. Where had he gone, and why? I didn't know. Did they find him? I didn't know that either. Of course they found him. They are good at that. If he wasn't carrying a rifle he would not have been killed. They don't kill people without reason. So what could he expect? Two years in a penal battalion and then the month in *spetsnaz* that he had not completed.

Spetsnaz has no distinguishing badge or insignia – officially, at any rate. But unofficially the *spetsnaz* badge is a wolf, or rather a pack of wolves. The wolf is a strong, proud animal which is remarkable for its quite incredible powers of endurance. A wolf can run for hours through deep snow at great speed, and then, when he scents his prey, put on another astonishing burst of speed. Sometimes he will chase his prey for days, reducing it to a state of exhaustion. Exploiting their great capacity for endurance, wolves first exhaust and then attack animals noted for their tremendous strength, such as the elk. People say rightly that the 'wolf lives on its legs'. Wolves will bring down a huge elk, not so much by the strength of their teeth as by the strength of their legs.

The wolf also has a powerful intellect. He is proud and independent. You can tame and domesticate a squirrel, a fox or even a great elk with bloodshot eyes. And there are many animals that can be trained to perform. A performing bear can do really miraculous things. But you cannot tame a wolf or train it to perform. The wolf lives in a pack, a closely knit and well organised fighting unit of frightful predators. The tactics of a wolf pack are the very embodiment of flexibility and daring. The wolves' tactics are an enormous collection of various tricks and combinations, a mixture of cunning and strength, confusing manoeuvres and sudden attacks.

No other animal in the world could better serve as a symbol of the *spetsnaz*. And there is good reason why the training of a *spetsnaz* soldier starts with the training of his legs. A man is as strong and young as his legs are strong and young. If a man has a

sloppy way of walking and if he drags his feet along the ground, that means he himself is weak. On the other hand, a dancing, springy gait is a sure sign of physical and mental health. *Spetsnaz* soldiers are often dressed up in the uniform of other branches of the services and stationed in the same military camps as other especially secret units, usually with communications troops. But one doesn't need any special experience to pick out the *spetsnaz* man from the crowd. You can tell him by the way he walks. I shall never forget one soldier who was known as 'The Spring'. He was not very tall, slightly stooping and round-shouldered. But his feet were never still. He kept dancing about the whole time. He gave the impression of being restrained only by some invisible string, and if the string were cut the soldier would go on jumping, running and dancing and never stop. The military commissariat whose job it was to select the young soldiers and sort them out paid no attention to him and he fetched up in an army missile brigade. He had served almost a year there when the brigade had to take part in manoeuvres in which a *spetsnaz* company was used against them. When the exercise was over the *spetsnaz* company was fed there in the forest next to the missile troops. The officer commanding the *spetsnaz* company noticed the soldier in the missile unit who kept dancing about all the time he was standing in the queue for his soup.

'Come over here, soldier.' The officer drew a line on the ground. 'Now jump.'

The soldier stood on the line and jumped from there, without any run-up. The company commander did not have anything with him to measure the length of the jump, but there was no need. The officer was experienced in such things and knew what was good and what was excellent.

'Get into my car!'

'I cannot, comrade major, without my officer's permission.'

'Get in and don't worry, you'll be all right with me. I will speak up for you and tell the right people where you have been.'

The company commander made the soldier get into his car and an hour later presented him to the chief of army intelligence, saying:

'Comrade colonel, look what I've found among the missile troops.'

'Now then, young man, let's see you jump.'

The soldier jumped from the spot. This time there was a tape measure handy and it showed he had jumped 2 metres 41 centimetres.

'Take the soldier into your lot and find him the right sort of cap,' the colonel said.

The commander of the *spetsnaz* company took off his own blue beret and gave it to the soldier. The chief of intelligence immediately phoned the chief of staff of the army, who gave the appropriate order to the missile brigade – forget you ever had such a man.

The dancing soldier was given the nickname 'The Spring' on account of his flexibility. He had never previously taken a serious interest in sport, but he was a born athlete. Under the direction of experienced trainers his talents were revealed and he immediately performed brilliantly. A year later, when he completed his military service, he was already clearing 2 metres 90 centimetres. He was invited to join the professional athletic service of *spetsnaz*, and he agreed.

The long jump with no run has been undeservedly forgotten and is no longer included in the programme of official competitions. When it was included in the Olympic Games the record set in 1908, was 3 metres 33 centimetres. As an athletic skill the long jump without a run is the most reliable indication of the strength of a person's legs. And the strength of his legs is a reliable indicator of the whole physical condition of a soldier. Practically half a person's muscles are to be found in his legs. *Spetsnaz* devotes colossal attention to developing the legs of its men, using many simple but very effective exercises: running upstairs, jumping with ankles tied together up a few steps and down again, running up steep sandy slopes, jumping down from a great height, leaping from moving cars and trains, knee-bending with a barbell on the shoulders, and of course the jump from a spot. At the end of the 1970s the *spetsnaz* record in this exercise, which has not been recognised by the official sports authorities, was 3 metres 51 centimetres.

A *spetsnaz* soldier knows that he is invincible. This may be a matter of opinion, but other people's opinions do not interest the soldier. He knows himself that he is invincible and that's enough for him. The idea is instilled into him carefully, delicately, not too insistently, but continually and effectively. The process of psychological training is inseparably linked to the physical toughening. The development of a spirit of self-confidence and of indepen-

dence and of a feeling of superiority over any opponent is carried out at the same time as the development of the heart, the muscles and the lungs. The most important element in training a *spetsnaz* soldier is to make him believe in his own strength.

A man's potential is unlimited, the reasoning goes. A man can reach any heights in life in any sphere of activity. But in order to defeat his opponents a man must first overcome himself, combat his own fears, his lack of confidence and laziness. The path upwards is one of continual battle with oneself. A man must force himself to rise sooner than the others and go to bed later. He must exclude from his life everything that prevents him from achieving his objective. He must subordinate the whole of his existence to the strictest regime. He must give up taking days off. He must use his time to the best possible advantage and fit in even more than was thought possible. A man aiming for a particular target can succeed only if he uses every minute of his life to the maximum advantage for carrying out his plan. A man should find four hours' sleep quite sufficient, and the rest of his time can be used for concentrating on the achievement of his objective.

I imagine that to instil this psychology into a mass army formed by means of compulsory mobilisation would be impossible and probably unnecessary. But in separate units carefully composed of the best human material such a philosophy is entirely acceptable.

In numbers *spetsnaz* amounts to less than one per cent of all the Soviet armed forces in peacetime. *Spetsnaz* is the best, carefully selected part of the armed forces, and the philosophy of each man's unlimited potential has been adopted in its entirety by every member of the organisation. It is a philosophy which cannot be put into words. The soldier grasps it not with his head, but with his feet, his shoulders and his sweat. He soon becomes convinced that the path to victory and self-perfection is a battle with himself, with his own mental and physical weakness. Training of any kind makes sense only if it brings a man to the very brink of his physical and mental powers. To begin with, he must know precisely the limits of his capabilities. For example: he can do 40 press-ups. He must know this figure precisely and that it really is the limit of his capacity. No matter how he strains he can do no more. But every training session is a cruel battle to beat his previous record. As he starts a training session a soldier has to promise himself that he will beat his own record today or die in the attempt.

The only people who become champions are those who go into each training session as if they are going to their death or to their last battle in which they will either win or die. The victor is the one for whom victory is more important than life. The victor is the one who dives a centimetre deeper than his maximum depth, knowing that his lungs will not hold out and that death lies beyond his limit. And once he has overcome the fear of death, the next time he will dive even deeper! *Spetsnaz* senior lieutenant Vladimir Salnikov, world champion and Olympic champion swimmer, repeats the slogan every day: conquer yourself, and that was why he defeated everyone at the Olympic Games.

An excellent place to get to know and to overcome oneself is the 'Devil's Ditch' which has been dug at the *spetsnaz* central training centre near Kirovograd. It is a ditch with metal spikes stuck into the bottom. The narrowest width is three metres. From there it gets wider and wider.

Nobody is forced to jump the ditch. But if someone wants to test himself, to conquer himself and to overcome his own cowardice, let him go and jump. It can be a standing jump or a running jump, in running shoes and a track suit, with heavy boots and a big rucksack on your back, or carrying a weapon. It is up to you. You start jumping at the narrow part and gradually move outwards. If you make a mistake, trip on something or don't reach the other side you land with your side on the spikes.

There were not many who wanted to risk their guts at the Devil's Ditch, until a strict warning was put up: 'Only for real *spetsnaz* fighters!' Now nobody has to be invited to try it. There are always plenty of people there and always somebody jumping, summer and winter, on slippery mud and snow, in gas-masks and without them, carrying an ammunition box, hand-in-hand, with hands tied together, and even with someone on the back. The man who jumps the Devil's Ditch has confidence in himself, considers himself invincible, and has grounds for doing so.

The relations within *spetsnaz* units are very similar to those within the wolf pack. We do not know everything about the habits and the ways of wolves. But I have heard Soviet zoologists talk about the life and behaviour of wolves and, listening to them, I have been reminded of *spetsnaz*. They say the wolf has not only a very developed brain but is also the noblest of all the living things inhabiting our planet. The mental capacity of the wolf is reckoned

to be far greater than the dog's. What I have heard from experts who have spent their whole lives in the *taiga* of the Ussuri, coming across wolves every day, is sharply at odds with what people say about them who have seen them only in zoos.

The experts say that the she-wolf never kills her sickly wolf-cubs. She makes her other cubs do it. The she-wolf herself gives the cubs the first lesson in hunting in a group. And the cubs' first victim is their weaker brother. But once the weaker ones are disposed of, the she-wolf protects the rest. In case of danger she would rather sacrifice herself than let anyone harm them. By destroying the weaker cubs the she-wolf preserves the purity and strength of her offspring, permitting only the strong to live. This is very close to the process of selection within *spetsnaz*. At the outset the weaker soldier is naturally not killed but thrown out of *spetsnaz* into a more restful service. When a unit is carrying out a serious operation behind enemy lines, however, the wolf-cubs of *spetsnaz* will kill their comrade without a second thought if he appears to weaken. The killing of the weak is not the result of a court decision but of lynch law. It may appear to be an act of barbarism, but it is only by doing so that the wolves have retained their strength for millions of years and remained masters of the forests until such a time as an even more frightful predator – man – started to destroy them on a massive scale.

But the she-wolf has also another reputation, and it is no accident that the Romans for centuries had a she-wolf as the symbol of their empire. A strong, wise, cruel and at the same time caring and affectionate she-wolf reared two human cubs: could there be a more striking symbol of love and strength?

Within their pack the wolves conduct a running battle to gain a higher place in the hierarchy. And I never saw anything inside *spetsnaz* that could be described as soldier's friendship, at least nothing like what I had seen among the tank troops and the infantry. Within *spetsnaz* a bitter battle goes on for a place in the pack, closer to the leader and even in the leader's place. In the course of this bitter battle for a place in the pack the *spetsnaz* soldier is sometimes capable of displaying such strength of character as I have never seen elsewhere.

The beating up of the young recruits who are just starting their service is an effort on the part of the *stariki* to preserve their dominating position in the section, platoon or company. But

among the recruits too there is right from the beginning a no less bitter battle going on for priority. This struggle takes the form of continual fighting between groups and individuals. Even among the *stariki* not everyone is on the same level: they also have their various levels of seniority. The more senior levels strive to keep the inferior ones under their control. The inferior ones try to extract themselves from that control. It is very difficult, because if a young soldier tries to oppose someone who has served half a year more than he has, the longer-serving man will be supported not only by the whole of his class but also by the other senior classes: the *salaga* is not only offending a soldier senior to himself (never mind who he is and what the older ones think of him) but is also undermining the whole tradition established over the decades in *spetsnaz* and the rest of the Soviet Army. In spite of all this, attempts at protest by the inferior classes occur regularly and are sometimes successful.

I recall a soldier of enormous physique and brutal features known as 'The Demon' who, after serving for half a year, got together a group of soldiers from all the classes and lorded it over not just his own platoon but the whole company. He was good at sensing the mood of a company. He and his group never attacked *stariki* in normal circumstances. They would wait patiently until one of the *stariki* did something which by *spetsnaz* standards is considered a disgrace, like stealing. Only then would they set about him, usually at night. The Demon was skilful at making use of provocation. For example, having stolen a bottle of aftershave from a soldier, he would slip it to one of his enemies. There is no theft in *spetsnaz*. The thief is, then, always discovered very quickly and punished mercilessly. And The Demon was, of course, in charge of the punitive action.

But seniority in *spetsnaz* units is not determined only by means of fists. In The Demon's group there was a soldier known as 'The Squint', a man of medium height and build. I do not know how it came about, but it soon became apparent that, although The Demon was lording it over the whole company, he never opposed The Squint. One day The Squint made fun of him in public, drawing attention to his ugly nostrils. There was some mild laughter in the company and The Demon was clearly humiliated, but for some reason he did not choose to exercise his strength. The Squint soon came to dominate the whole company, but it never

occurred to him to fight anyone or to order anybody about. He simply told The Demon out loud what he wanted, and The Demon used his strength to influence the whole company. This went on for about three months. How the system worked and why, was not for us officers to know. We watched what was going on from the sidelines, neither interfering nor trying to look too closely into it.

But then there was a revolution. Someone caught The Demon out in a provocation. The Demon again stole something and slipped it to one of his *stariki*, and he was found out. The Demon and The Squint and their closest friends were beaten all night until the duty officer intervened. The Demon and The Squint were locked up temporarily in a store where they kept barrels of petrol. They kept them there for several days because the likelihood of a bloody settling of accounts was considerable. Meanwhile the whole affair was reported to the chief of Intelligence for the district. Knowing the way things were done in *spetsnaz*, he decided that both men should be tried by a military tribunal. The result was a foregone conclusion. As usual the tribunal did not hear the true causes of the affair. The officer commanding the company simply put together a number of minor offences: being late on parade, late for inspection, found in a drunken state, and so forth. The whole company confirmed everything in their evidence, and the accused made no attempt to deny the charges. Yet there was some rough justice in the process, because they probably both deserved their sentences of eighteen months in a penal battalion.

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The silent majority can put up with anything for a long time. But sometimes a spark lands in the powder keg and there is a frightful explosion. Often in *spetsnaz* a group of especially strong and bullying soldiers will dominate the scene for a certain time, until suddenly a terrible counter blow is struck, whereupon the group is broken up into pieces and its members, scorned and disliked, have to give way to another group.

In every company there are a few soldiers who do not try to dominate the rest, who do not voice their opinions and who do not try to achieve great influence. At the same time everyone is aware of some enormous hidden strength in them, and no one dares to touch them. This kind of soldier is usually found somewhere near the top of the platoon's hierarchy, rarely at the very top.

I remember a soldier known as 'The Machine'. He always kept himself to himself. He probably experienced no great emotions, and by *spetsnaz* standards he was probably too kind and placid a person. He did his job properly and seemed never to experience in his work either enthusiasm or resentment. Nobody, not even The Demon, dared touch The Machine. On one occasion, when The Demon was beating up one of the young soldiers, The Machine went up to him and said, 'That's enough of that.' The Demon did not argue, but stopped what he was doing and moved away. The Machine reverted to silence.

It was clear to everyone that The Machine's dislike of The Demon had not been given its full expression. And so it was. On the night when the whole company beat up The Demon and The Squint, The Machine lay on his bed and took no part in the beating. Finally his patience gave out, he went to the toilet where the sentence was being carried out, pushed the crowd aside with his enormous hands and said, 'Let me give him a punch.'

He gave The Demon a blow in the stomach with his mighty fist. Everyone thought he had killed the man, who bent double and collapsed in a heap like a wooden puppet with string instead of joints. They poured water over him and for half an hour afterwards did not strike him. They were afraid of finishing it off, afraid they would be tried for murder. Then they saw that The Demon had survived and they continued to beat him. Quite aloof from the squabble for top position in the company, The Machine had gone straight back to bed.

In the same company there was a soldier known as 'The Otter'; slim, well-built, handsome. He was not very big and appeared to have little strength. But he was like a sprung steel plate. His strength seemed to be explosive. He had amazing reactions. When, as a recruit, he first jumped over the towel, he was subjected to the usual treatment by the *stariki*. 'Drop your pants and lie down,' they said. He took hold of his belt as though he was ready to carry out their orders. They dropped their guard, and at that moment The Otter struck one of them in the mouth with such a blow that his victim fell to the ground and was knocked senseless. While he was falling The Otter struck another one in the teeth. A third backed out of the way.

That night, when he was asleep, they bound him in a blanket and beat him up brutally. They beat him the second night, and the

third, and again and again. But he was a very unusual person even by *spetsnaz* standards. He possessed rather unusual muscles. When they were relaxed they looked like wet rags. He suffered a lot of beatings, but one had the impression that when he was relaxed he felt no pain. Perhaps there were qualities in his character that put him above the standards we were used to. When The Otter slept he was then in the power of the *stariki* and they did not spare him. They attacked him in the dark, so that he should not recognise his attackers. But he knew all of them instinctively. He never quarrelled with them and he always avoided groups of them. If they attacked him in the daylight he made no great effort to resist. But if he came across a *stariki* on his own he would punch him in the teeth. If he came across him again he would do the same again. He could knock a man's teeth out. He would strike suddenly and like lightning. He would be standing relaxed, his arms hanging down, looking at the ground. Then suddenly there would be a frightful, shattering blow. On several occasions he punched *stariki* in the presence of the whole company and sometimes even with officers present. How beautifully he punched them! If there were officers present the company commander would admire The Otter and indicate his approval with a smile on his face – then sentence him to three days in the guard room, because they were not allowed to hit each other.

This went on for a long time, until the *stariki* became tired of it all and left him alone. Nobody touched him any more. Six months later they offered him a place at the very top. He refused, still keeping his silence. He never got involved in the affairs of the platoon and had no desire and no claim to be a leader. When the whole company was beating up The Demon The Otter did not join in. Some years later I met a *spetsnaz* man I knew and learnt that The Machine had been offered a job with the professional athletic service. He had refused and had gone back to some remote Siberian village where his home was. But The Otter had accepted the offer and is now serving in one of the best *spetsnaz* formations, training for the ultimate job of assassinating key political and military figures on the enemy's side.

■ ■ ■

There are other ways in which a *spetsnaz* soldier can defend his position in the hierarchy, apart from punching people in the face.

Spetsnaz respects people who take risks, who have strength and display courage. A man who will jump further than others on a motorcycle, or one who will wait longer than others to open his parachute, or one who hammers nails into a plank with the palm of his hand – such people are assured of respect. A man who goes on running in spite of tiredness when all the others are collapsing, who can go longer than others without food and drink, who can shoot better than the others – such people are also well thought of. But when everybody is thought highly of, there is still a struggle among the best. And if there is no other way for a man to show that he is better than another, physical violence will break out.

Two soldiers in leading positions may fight each other secretly without anyone else being present: they go off into the forest and fight it out. A conflict may begin with a sudden, treacherous attack by one man on another. There are also open, legal encounters. Sport is particularly admired by *spetsnaz*. The whole company is brought together, and they fight each other without rules, using all the tricks that *spetsnaz* has taught them – boxing, sambo, karate. Some fights go on until the first blood is drawn. Others go on until one person is humiliated and admits he is defeated.

Among the various ways of finding leaders a very effective one is the fight with whips. It is an old gypsy way of establishing a relationship. The leather-plaited whip several metres long is a weapon only rarely met with in *spetsnaz*. But if a soldier (usually a Kalmik, a Mongolian or a gypsy) shows that he can handle the weapon with real skill he is allowed to carry a whip with him as a weapon. When two experts with the whip meet up and each claims to be the better one, the argument is resolved in a frightful contest.

■ ■ ■

When we speak about the customs observed within *spetsnaz* we must of course take into account the simple fact that *spetsnaz* has its own standards and its own understanding of the words 'bad' and 'good'. Let us not be too strict in our judgement of the *spetsnaz* soldiers for their cruel ways, their bloodthirstiness and their lack of humanity. *Spetsnaz* is a closed society of people living permanently at the extreme limits of human existence. They are people who even in peacetime are risking their lives. Their existence bears no relation at all to the way the majority of the inhabitants of our

planet live. In *spetsnaz* a man can be admired for qualities of which the average man may have no idea.

The typical *spetsnaz* soldier is a sceptic, a cynic and a pessimist. He believes profoundly in the depravity of human nature and knows (from his own experience) that in extreme conditions a man becomes a beast. There are situations where a man will save the lives of others at the expense of his own life. But in the opinion of the *spetsnaz* men this happens only in a sudden emergency: for example, a man may throw himself in front of a train to push another man aside and save his life. But when an emergency situation, such as a terrible famine, lasts for months or even years, the *spetsnaz* view is that it is every man for himself. If a man helps another in need it means that the need is not extreme. If a man shares his bread with another in time of famine it means the famine is not extreme.

In the *spetsnaz* soldier's opinion the most dangerous thing he can do is put faith in his comrade, who may at the most critical moment turn out to be a beast. It is much simpler for him not to trust his comrade (or anybody else), so that in a critical situation there will be no shattered illusions. Better that he regards all his fellow human beings as beasts from the outset than to make that discovery in an utterly hopeless situation.

The soldier's credo can be stated in a triple formula: Don't trust, don't beg, don't fear. It is a formula which did not originate in *spetsnaz*, but in prisons many centuries ago. In it can be seen the whole outlook of the *spetsnaz* soldier: his practically superhuman contempt for death, and a similar contempt for everybody around him. He does not believe in justice, goodness or humanity. He does not even believe in force until it has been demonstrated by means of a fist, a whip or the teeth of a dog. When it is demonstrated his natural reflex is to challenge it immediately.

Sometimes in the life of a *spetsnaz* soldier he has a sort of revelation, a sense of complete freedom and happiness. In this mental state he fears nobody at all, trusts no one at all, and would not ask anybody for anything, even for mercy. This state comes about in a combination of circumstances in which a soldier would go voluntarily to his death, completely contemptuous of it. At that moment the soldier's mind triumphs completely over cowardice, the vileness and meanness around him. Once he has experienced this sensation of liberation, the soldier is capable of any act of

heroism, even sacrificing his life to save a comrade. But his act has nothing in common with ordinary soldiers' friendship. The motive behind such an act is to show, at the cost of his own life, his superiority over all around him, including the comrade he saves.

In order for such a moment of revelation to come on some occasion, the soldier goes through a long and careful training. All the beatings, all the insults and humiliations that he has suffered, are steps on the path to a brilliant suicidal feat of heroism. The well-fed, self-satisfied, egoistic soldier will never perform any acts of heroism. Only someone who has been driven barefoot into the mud and snow, who has had even his bread taken away from him and has proved every day with his fists his right to existence – only this kind of man is capable of showing one day that he really is the best.

Chapter 5
The 'Other People'

Although the vast majority of *spetsnaz* is made up of Slavonic personnel, there are some exceptions.

At first glance you would say he is a gypsy. Tall, well- built, athletic in his movements, handsome, with a hooked nose and flashing eyes. The captain plays the guitar so well that passers-by stop and do not go away until he stops playing. He dances as very few know how. His officer's uniform fits him as if it were on a dummy in the window of the main military clothing shop on the Arbat.

The officer has had a typical career. He was born in 1952 in Ivanovo, where he went to school. Then he attended the higher school for airborne troops in Ryazan, and he wears the uniform of the airborne forces. He commands a company in the Siberian military district. All very typical and familiar. At first glance. But he is Captain Roberto Rueda-Maestro – not a very usual name for a Soviet officer.

There is a mistake: the captain is not a gypsy. And if we study him more carefully we notice some other peculiarities. He is wearing the uniform of the airborne troops. But there are no airborne troops in the Siberian military district where he is stationed. Even stranger is the fact that after finishing school Roberto spent some time in Spain as a tourist. That was in 1969. Can we imagine a tourist from the Soviet Union being in Spain under Franco's rule, at a time when the Soviet Union maintained

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no diplomatic relations with Spain? Roberto Rueda-Maestro *was* in Spain at that time and has some idea of the country. But the strangest aspect of this story is that, after spending some time in a capitalist country, the young man was able to enter a Soviet military school. And not any school, but the Ryazan higher school for airborne troops.

These facts are clues. The full set of clues gives us the right answer, without fear of contradiction. The captain is a *spetsnaz* officer.

■ ■ ■

During the Civil War in Spain thousands of Spanish children were evacuated to the Soviet Union. The exact number of children evacuated is not known. The figures given about this are very contradictory. But there were enough of them for several full-length films to be made and for books and articles to be written about them in the Soviet Union.

As young men they soon became cadets at Soviet military schools. A well-known example is Ruben Ruis Ibarruri, son of Dolores Ibarruri, general secretary of the Communist Party of Spain. Even at this time the Spaniards were put into the airborne troops. Ruben Ibarruri, for example, found himself in the 8th airborne corps. It is true that in a war of defence those formations intended for aggressive advancing operations were found to be unnecessary, and they were reorganised into guard rifle divisions and used in defensive battles at Stalingrad. Lieutenant Ibarruri was killed while serving in the 35th guard rifle division which had been formed out of the 8th airborne corps. It was a typical fate for young men at that time. But then they were evacuated to the Urals and Siberia, where the Spanish Communist Party (under Stalin's control) organised special schools for them. From then on references to Spanish children appeared very rarely in the Soviet press.

■ ■ ■

One of the special schools was situated in the town of Ivanovo and was known as the E. D. Stasova International School. Some graduates of this school later turned up in Fidel Castro's personal bodyguard, some became leading figures in the Cuban intelligence service – the most aggressive in the world, exceeding its teachers in the GRU and KGB in both cruelty and cunning. Some of the school's graduates were used as 'illegals' by the GRU and KGB.

It has to be said, however, that the majority of the first generation of Spanish children remained in the Soviet Union with no possibility of leaving it. But then in the 1950s and 1960s a new generation of Soviet Spaniards was born, differing from the first generation in that it had no parents in the USSR. This is very important if a young man is being sent abroad on a risky mission, for the Communists then have the man's parents as hostages.

The second generation of Spaniards is used by the Soviet Government in many ways for operations abroad. One very effective device is to send some young Soviet Spaniards to Cuba, give them time to get used to the country and acclimatise themselves, and then send them to Africa and Central America as Cubans to fight against 'American Imperialism'. The majority of Cuban troops serving abroad are certainly Cubans. But among them is a certain percentage of men who were born in the Soviet Union and who have Russian wives and children and a military rank in the armed forces of the USSR.

For some reason Captain Roberto Rueda-Maestro is serving in the Urals military district. I must emphasise that we are still talking about the usual *spetsnaz* units, and we haven't started to discuss 'agents'. An agent is a citizen of a foreign country recruited into the Soviet intelligence service. Roberto is a citizen of the Soviet Union. He does not have and has never had in his life any other citizenship. He has a Russian wife and children born on the territory of the USSR, as he was himself. That is why the captain is serving in a normal *spetsnaz* unit, as an ordinary Soviet officer.

Spetsnaz seeks out and finds – it is easy to do in the Soviet Union – people born in the Soviet Union but of obviously foreign origin. With a name like Ruedo-Maestro it is very difficult to make a career in any branch of the Soviet armed forces. The only exception is *spetsnaz*, where such a name is no obstacle but a passport to promotion.

■ ■ ■

In *spetsnaz* I have met people with German names such as Stolz, Schwarz, Weiss and so forth. The story of these Soviet Germans is also connected with the war. According to 1979 figures there were 1,846,000 Germans living in the Soviet Union. But most of those

Germans came to Russia two hundred years ago and are of no use to *spetsnaz*. Different Germans are required, and they also exist in the Soviet Union.

During the war, and especially in its final stages, the Red Army took a tremendous number of German soldiers prisoner. The prisoners were held in utterly inhuman conditions, and it was not surprising that some of them did things that they would not have done in any other situation. They were people driven to extremes by the brutal Gulag regime, who committed crimes against their fellow prisoners, sometimes even murdering their comrades, or forcing them to suicide. Many of those who survived, once released from the prison camp, were afraid to return to Germany and settled in the Soviet Union. Though the percentage of such people was small it still meant quite a lot of people, all of whom were of course on the records of the Soviet secret services and were used by them. The Soviet special services helped many of them to settle down and have a family. There were plenty of German women from among the Germans long settled in Russia. So now the Soviet Union has a second generation of Soviet Germans, born in the Soviet Union of fathers who have committed crimes against the German people. This is the kind of young German who can be met with in many *spetsnaz* units.

■ ■ ■

Very rarely one comes across young Soviet Italians, too, with the same background as the Spaniards and Germans. And *spetsnaz* contains Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Koreans, Mongolians, Finns and people of other nationalities. How they came to be there I do not know. But it can be taken for granted that every one of them has a much-loved family in the Soviet Union. *Spetsnaz* trusts its soldiers, but still prefers to have hostages for each of its men.

The result is that the percentage of *spetsnaz* soldiers who were born in the Soviet Union to parents of genuine foreign extraction is quite high. With the mixture of Soviet nationalities, mainly Russian, Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Georgians and Uzbeks, the units are a very motley company indeed. You may even, suddenly, come across a real Chinese. Such people, citizens of the USSR but of foreign extraction, are known as 'the other people'. I don't know where the name came from, but the foreigners accept it and are not offended. In my view

it is used without any tinge of racism, in a spirit rather of friendship and good humour, to differentiate people who are on the one hand Soviet people born in the Soviet Union of Soviet parents, and who on the other hand differ sharply from the main body of *spetsnaz* soldiers in their appearance, speech, habits and manners.

I have never heard of there being purely national formations within *spetsnaz* – a German platoon or a Spanish company. It is perfectly possible that they would be created in case of necessity, and perhaps there are some permanent *spetsnaz* groups chosen on a purely national basis. But I cannot confirm this.

Chapter 6
Athletes

In the Soviet Union sport has been nationalised. That means to say that it does not serve the interests of individuals but of society as a whole. The interests of the individual and the interests of society are sometimes very different. The state defends the interests of society against individuals, not just in sport but in all other spheres.

Some individuals want to be strong, handsome and attractive. That is why 'body-building' is so popular in the West. It is an occupation for individuals. In the Soviet Union it scarcely exists, because such an occupation brings no benefit to the state. Why should the state spend the nation's resources so that someone can be strong and beautiful? Consequently the state does not spend a single *kopek* on such things, does not organise athletic competitions, does not reward the victors with prizes and does not advertise achievements in that field. There are some individuals who engage in body-building, but they have no resources and no rights to organise their own societies and associations.

The same applies to billiards, golf and some other forms of which the only purpose is relaxation and amusement. What benefits would it bring the state if it spent money on such forms of sport? For the same reason the Soviet Union has done nothing about sport for invalids. Why should it? To make the invalids happy?

But that same state devotes colossal resources to sport which

does bring benefit to the state. In the Soviet Union any sport is encouraged which: demonstrates the superiority of the Soviet system over any other system; provides the ordinary people with something to take their minds off their everyday worries; helps to strengthen the state, military and police apparatus.

The Soviet Union is ready to encourage any sport in which achievement is measured in minutes, seconds, metres, kilometres, centimetres, kilograms or grams. If an athlete shows some promise that he may run a distance a tenth of a second quicker than an American or may jump half a centimetre higher than his rival across the ocean, the state will create for such an athlete whatever conditions he needs: it will build him a personal training centre, get together a personal group of trainers, doctors, managers or scientific consultants. The state is rich enough to spend money on self-advertisement. These 'amateur' sportsmen earn large sums of money, though exactly how much is a secret. The question has irritated some Soviets because it would not be a secret if the amount were small. Even the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, on 6 August, 1986, raised the question with some indignation.

The Soviet Union encourages any striking spectator sport which can attract millions of people, make them drop what they are doing and admire the Soviet gymnasts, figure-skaters or acrobats. It also encourages all team games. Basketball, volleyball, water polo are all popular. The most aggressive of the team games, ice-hockey, is perhaps more of a national religion than is Communist ideology. Finally, it encourages any sport directly connected with the development of military skills: shooting, flying, gliding, parachute jumping, boxing, sambo, karate, the biathlon, the military triathlon, and so forth.

The most successful, richest and largest society in the Soviet Union concerned with sport is the Central Army Sports Club (ZSKA). Members of the club have included 850 European champions, 625 world champions and 182 Olympic champions. They have set up 341 European and 430 world records.[1]

Such results do not indicate that the Soviet Army is the best at training top-class athletes. This was admitted even by *Pravda*.[2]

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[1] All figures as of 1 January, 1979.
[2] 2 September, 1985.

The secret of success lies in the enormous resources of the Soviet Army. *Pravda* describes what happens: 'It is sufficient for some even slightly promising boxer to come on the scene and he is immediately lured across to the ZSKA.' As a result, out of the twelve best boxers in the Soviet Union ten are from the Army Club, one from *Dinamo* (the sports organisation run by the KGB), and one from the *Trud* sports club. But of those ten army boxers, not one was the original product of the Army club. They had all been lured away from other clubs – the *Trudoviye reservy*, the *Spartak* or the *Burevestnik*. The same thing happens in ice-hockey, parachute jumping, swimming and many other sports.

How does the army club manage to attract athletes to it? Firstly be giving them military rank. Any athlete who joins the ZSKA is given the rank of sergeant, sergeant-major, warrant officer or officer, depending on what level he is at. The better his results as an athlete the higher the rank. Once he has a military rank an athlete is able to devote as much time to sport as he wishes and at the same time be regarded as an amateur, because professionally he is a soldier. Any Soviet 'amateur' athlete who performs slightly better than the average receives extra pay in various forms – 'for additional nourishment', 'for sports clothing', 'for travelling', and so forth. The 'amateur' receives for indulging in his sport much more than a doctor or a skilled engineer, so long as he achieves European standards. But the Soviet Army also pays him, and not badly, for his military rank and service.

The ZSKA is very attractive for an athlete in that, when he can no longer engage in his sport at international level, he can still retain his military rank and pay. In most other clubs he would be finished altogether. What has this policy produced? At the 14th winter Olympic Games, Soviet military athletes won seventeen gold medals. If one counts also the number of silver and bronze winners, the number of athletes with military rank is greatly increased. And if one were to draw up a similar list of military athletes at the summer Games it would take up many pages. Is there a single army in the world that comes near the Soviet Army in this achievement?

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Now for another question: why is the Soviet Army so ready to hand out military ranks to athletes, to pay them a salary and provide them with the accommodation and privileges of army officers?

The answer is that the ZSKA and its numerous branches provide a base that *spetsnaz* uses for recruiting its best fighters. Naturally not every member of the ZSKA is a *spetsnaz* soldier. But the best athletes in ZSKA almost always are.

Spetsnaz is a mixture of sport, politics, espionage and armed terrorism. It is difficult to determine what takes precedence and what is subordinate to what, everything is so closely linked together.

In the first place the Soviet Union seeks international prestige in the form of gold medals at the Olympics. To achieve that it needs an organisation with the strictest discipline and rules, capable of squeezing every ounce of strength out of the athletes without ever letting them slack off.

In the second place the Soviet Army needs an enormous number of people with exceptional athletic ability at Olympic level to carry out special missions behind the enemy's lines. It is desirable that these people should be able to visit foreign countries in peace time. Sport makes that possible. As far as the athletes are concerned, they are grateful for a very rich club which can pay them well, provide them with cars and apartments, and arrange trips abroad for them. Moreover, they need the sort of club in which they can be regarded as amateurs, though they will work nowhere else but in the club.

Spetsnaz is the point where the interests of the state, the Soviet Army and military intelligence coincide with the interests of some individuals who want to devote their whole lives to sport.

■ ■ ■

After the Second World War, as a result of the experience gained, sports battalions were created by the headquarters of every military district, group of forces and fleet; at army and flotilla HQ level sports companies were formed. These huge sports formations were directly under the control of the Ministry of Defence. They provided the means of bringing together the best athletes whose job was to defend the sporting honour of the particular army, flotilla, district, group or fleet in which they served. Some of the athletes were people called up for their military service, who left the Army once they had completed their service. But the majority remained in the military sports organisation for a long time with the rank of sergeant and higher. Soviet military intelligence chose its best men from the members of the sports units.

At the end of the 1960s it was recognised that a sports company

or a sports battalion was too much of a contradiction in terms. It could arouse unnecessary attention from outsiders. So the sports units were disbanded and in their place came the sports teams. The change was purely cosmetic. The sports teams of the military districts, groups, fleets and so forth exist as independent units. The soldiers, sergeants, *praporshiki* and officers who belong to them are not serving in army regiments, brigades or divisions. Their service is in the sports team under the control of the district's headquarters. The majority of these sportsmen are carefully screened and recruited for *spetsnaz* training to carry out the most risky missions behind the enemy's lines. Usually they are all obliged to take part in parachute jumping, sambo, rifle-shooting, running and swimming, apart from their own basic sport.

A person looking at the teams of the military districts, groups and so forth with an untrained eye will notice nothing unusual. It is as though *spetsnaz* is a completely separate entity. Every athlete and every small group have their own individual tasks and get on with them: running, swimming, jumping and shooting. But later, in the evenings, in closed, well-guarded premises, they study topography, radio communications, engineering and other special subjects. They are regularly taken off secretly in ones and twos or groups, or even regiments to remote parts where they take part in exercises. Companies and regiments of professional athletes in *spetsnaz* exist only temporarily during the exercises and alerts, and they then quietly disperse, becoming again innocent sections and teams able at the right moment to turn into formidable fighting units.

According to Colonel-General Shatilov, the athlete is more energetic and braver in battle, has more confidence in his strength, is difficult to catch unawares, reacts quickly to changes of circumstance and is less liable to tire. There is no disputing this. A first-class athlete is primarily a person who possesses great strength of will, who has defeated his own laziness and cowardice, who has forced himself to run every day till he drops and has trained his muscles to a state of complete exhaustion. An athlete is a man infected by the spirit of competition and who desires victory in a competition or battle more than the average man.

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In the sports sections and teams of the military districts, groups, armies, fleets, flotillas there is a very high percentage of women

also engaged in sport and who defend the honour of their district, group and so forth. Like the men, the women are given military rank and, like the men, are recruited into *spetsnaz*.

There are no women in the usual *spetsnaz* units. But in the professional sports units of *spetsnaz* women constitute about half the numbers. They engage in various kinds of sport: parachute jumping, gliding, flying, shooting, running, swimming, motocross, and so on. Every woman who joins *spetsnaz* has to engage in some associated forms of sport apart from her own basic sport, and among these are some that are obligatory, such as sambo, shooting and a few others. The woman have to take part in exercises along with the men and have to study the full syllabus of subjects necessary for operating behind the enemy's lines.

That there should be such a high percentage of women in the professional sports formations of *spetsnaz* is a matter of psychology and strategy: if in the course of a war a group of tall, broad-shouldered young men were to appear behind the lines this might give rise to bewilderment, since all the men are supposed to be at the front. But if in the same situation people were to see a group of athletic-looking girls there would be little likelihood of any alarm or surprise.

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To be successful in war you have to have a very good knowledge of the natural conditions in the area in which you are to be operating: the terrain and the climate. You must have a good idea of the habits of the local population, the language and the possibilities of concealment; the forests, undergrowth, mountains, caves, and the obstacles to be overcome; the rivers, ravines and gullies. You must know the whereabouts of the enemy's military units and police, the tactics they employ and so forth.

A private in the average *spetsnaz* unit cannot, of course, visit the places where he is likely to have to fight in the event of war. But a top-class professional athlete does have the opportunity. The Soviet Army takes advantage of such opportunities.

For example, in 1984 the 12th world parachuting championship took place in France. There were altogether twenty-six gold medals to be competed for, and the Soviet team won twenty-two of them. The 'Soviet team' was in fact a team belonging to the armed forces of the USSR. It consisted of five men and five women: a

captain, a senior *praporshik*, three *praporshiki*, a senior sergeant and four sergeants. The team's trainer, its doctor and the whole of the technical personnel were Soviet officers. The Soviet reporter accompanying the team was a colonel. This group of 'sportsmen' spent time in Paris and in the south of France. A very interesting and very useful trip, and there were other Soviet officers besides – for example a colonel who was the trainer of the Cuban team.

Now let us suppose a war has broken out. The Soviet Army must neutralise the French nuclear capability. France is the only country in Europe, apart from the Soviet Union itself, that stores strategic nuclear missiles in underground silos. The silos are an extremely important target, possibly the most important in Europe. The force that will put them out of action will be a *spetsnaz* force. And who will the Soviet high command send to carry out the mission? The answer is that, after the world parachuting championship, they have a tailor-made team.

It is often claimed that sport improves relations between countries. This is a strange argument. If it is the case, why did it not occur to anyone before the Second World War to invite German SS parachutists to their country to improve relations with the Nazis?

At the present time every country has good grounds for not receiving any Soviet military athletes on its own territory. The USSR should not be judged on its record. To take three cases: the Soviet Government sent troops into Czechoslovakia *temporarily*. We of course trust the statements made by the Soviet Government and know that after a certain time the Soviet troops will be withdrawn from Czechoslovakia. But until that happens there are sufficient grounds for 'temporarily' not allowing the Soviet Army into any free country.

Secondly, the Soviet Union introduced a 'limited' contingent of its troops into Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders' idea was that the word 'limited' would serve to reassure everyone – there would be grounds for concern if there were an 'unlimited' contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. But so long as the 'limited' contingent of Soviet troops is still in Afghanistan it would not be a bad idea to limit the number of Soviet colonels, majors, captains and sergeants in the countries of the West, especially those wearing blue berets and little gilt parachute badges on their lapels. It is those people in the blue berets who are killing

children, women and old men in Afghanistan in the most brutal and ruthless way.

Thirdly, a Soviet pilot shot down a passenger plane with hundreds of people in it. After that, is there any sense in meeting Soviet airmen at international competitions and finding out who is better and who is worse? Surely the answer is clear, without any competition.

Sport is politics, and big-time sport is big-time politics. At the end of the last war the Soviet Union seized the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the West has never recognised the Soviet Union's right to those territories. All right, said the Soviet leaders, if you won't recognise it *de jure*, recognise it *de facto*. A great deal has been done, some of it with the help of sport. During the Moscow Olympic Games some of the competitions took place in Moscow and some of them in the occupied territories of the Baltic states. At that time I talked to a number of Western politicians and sportsmen. I asked them: if the Soviet Union had occupied Sweden, would they have gone to the Olympic Games in Moscow? With one indignant voice they replied, 'No!' But if parts of the Games had taken place in Moscow and part in Stockholm would they have gone to occupied Stockholm? Here there was no limit to their indignation. They considered themselves people of character and they would never have gone to occupied countries. Then why, I asked, did they go to an Olympic Games, part of which took place in the occupied territory of the Baltic states? To that question I received no answer.

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The units made up of professional athletes in *spetsnaz* are an elite within an elite. They are made up of far better human material (some of Olympic standard), enjoy incomparably better living conditions and many more privileges than other *spetsnaz* units.

In carrying out their missions the professional athletes have the right to make contact with *spetsnaz* agents on enemy territory and obtain help from them. They are in effect the advance guard for all the other *spetsnaz* formations. They are the first to be issued with the latest weapons and equipment and the first to try out the newly devised and most risky kinds of operation. It is only after experiments have been carried out by the units of athletes that new

weapons, equipment and ways of operating are adopted by regular *spetsnaz* units. Here is an example:

In my book *Aquarium*, first published in July 1985, I described the period of my life when I served as an officer of the Intelligence directorate of a military district and often had to act as the personal representative of the district's chief of intelligence with the *spetsnaz* groups. The period I described was identified: it was after my return from 'liberated' Czechoslovakia and before I entered the Military-Diplomatic Academy in the summer of 1970.

I described the ordinary *spetsnaz* units that I had to deal with. One group carried out a parachute jump from 100 metres. Each man had just one parachute: in that situation a spare one was pointless. The jump took place over snow. Throughout the book I refer only to one type of parachute: the D–1–8. Four months later, in the magazine *Sovetsky Voin* for November 1985, a Lieutenant-General Lisov published what might be called the pre-history of group parachute jumps by *spetsnaz* units from critically low levels. The General describes a group jump from a height of 100 metres in which each man had only one parachute, and he explains that a spare one is not needed. The jump takes place over snow. The article refers to only one type of parachute – the D–1–8.

General Lisov was describing trials which were carried out from October 1967 to March 1968. The General did not, of course, say why the trials were carried out and the word *spetsnaz* was not, of course, used. But he underlined the fact that the trial was not conducted because it had any connection with sport. On the contrary, according to the rules laid down by the international sports bodies at that time, anyone who during a contest opened his parachute less than 400 metres from the ground was disqualified.

General Lisov conducted the trial contrary to all rules of the sport and not to demonstrate sporting prowess. The military athletes left the aircraft at a height of 100 metres, so their parachutes must have opened even lower down. The group jump took place simultaneously from several aircraft, with the parachutists leaving their plane at about one-second intervals. Each of them was in the air for between 9.5 and 13 seconds. General Lisov summed it up like this: 100 metres, 50 men, 23 seconds. An amazing result by any standards.

The fifty men symbolised the fifty years of the Soviet Army. It

was planned to carry out the jump of 23 February, 1968, on the Army's anniversary, but because of the weather it was postponed till 1 March.

I could not have known at that time about General Lisov's trials. But it is now clear to me that the tactic that was being developed in the *spetsnaz* fighting units in 1969–70 had been initiated by professional military athletes a year before.

This dangerous stunt was carried out in my ordinary *spetsnaz* unit in rather simpler conditions: we jumped in a group of thirteen men from the wide rear door of an Antonov–12 aircraft. The professionals described by General Lisov jumped from the narrow side doors of an Antonov–2, which is more awkward and dangerous. The professionals made the jump in a much bigger group, more closely together and with greater accuracy.

In spite of the fact that the ordinary *spetsnaz* units did not succeed and will never succeed in achieving results comparable with those of the professional athletes, nevertheless the idea of the group jump from a height of a hundred metres provided the fighting units with an exceptionally valuable technique. The special troops are on the ground before the planes have vanished over the horizon, and they are ready for action before the enemy has had time to grasp what is happening. They need this technique to be able to attack the enemy without any warning at all. That is the reason for taking such a risk.

During a war the fighting units of *spetsnaz* will be carrying out missions behind the enemy's lines. Surely the units of professional athletes, which are capable of carrying out extremely dangerous work with even greater precision and speed than the ordinary *spetsnaz* units, should not be left unemployed in wartime?

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Before leaving the subject entirely, I would like to add a few words about another use of Soviet athletes for terrorist operations. Not only the Soviet Army but also the Soviet state's punitive apparatus (known at various times as the NKVD, the MGB, the MVD and the KGB) has its own sports organisation, *Dinamo*. Here are some illustrations of its practical application.

'When the war broke out the "pure" parachutists disap-

peared. Anna Shishmareva joined the OMSBON.'[1] Anna Shishmareva is a famous Soviet woman athlete of the pre-war period, while OMSBON was a brigade of the NKVD's *osnaz* which I have already referred to. Another example: 'Among the people in our *osoby*, as our unit was called, were many athletes, record holders and Soviet champions famous before the war.'[2]

Finally: Boris Galushkin, the outstanding Soviet boxer of the pre-war period, was a lieutenant and worked as an interrogator in the NKVD. During the war he went behind the enemy lines in one of the *osnaz* units.

I have quite a few examples in my collection. But the KGB and the *Dinamo* sports club are not my field of interest. I hope that one of the former officers of the KGB who has fled to the West will write in greater detail about the use of athletes in the Soviet secret police.

However, I must also make mention of the very mysterious Soviet sporting society known as *Zenit*. Officially it belongs to the ministry for the aircraft industry. But there are some quite weighty reasons for believing that there is somebody else behind the club. The *Zenit* cannot be compared with the ZSKA or *Dinamo* in its sporting results or its popularity. But it occasionally displays a quite unusual aggressiveness in its efforts to acquire the best athletes. The style and the general direction of the training in the *Zenit* are very militarised and very similar to what goes on in the ZSKA and *Dinamo*. *Zenit* deserves greater attention than it has been shown. It is just possible that the researcher who studied *Zenit* and its connections seriously will make some surprising discoveries.

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[1] *Sovetsky Voin*, No. 20, 1985.
[2] *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 May, 1985.

Chapter 7
Selection and Training

Between soldiers and their officers are the sergeants, an intermediate rank with its own internal seniority of junior sergeants, full sergeants, senior sergeant and *starshina*. The training of the sergeants is of critical importance in *spetsnaz* where discipline and competence are required to an even more stringent degree than in the everyday life of the armed forces.

In normal circumstances training is carried out by special training divisions. Each of these has a permanent staff, a general, officers, warrant officers and sergeants and a limited number of soldiers in support units. Every six months the division receives 10,000 recruits who are distributed among the regiments and battalions on a temporary basis. After five months of harsh training these young soldiers receive their sergeants' stripes and are sent out to regular divisions. It takes a month to distribute the young sergeants to the regular forces, to prepare the training base for the new input and to receive a fresh contingent. After that the training programme is repeated. Thus each training division is a gigantic incubator producing 20,000 sergeants a year. A training division is organised in the usual way: three motorised rifle regiments, a tank regiment, an artillery regiment, an anti-aircraft regiment, a missile battalion and so forth. Each regiment and battalion trains specialists in its own field, from infantry sergeants to land surveyors, topographers and signallers.

A training division is a means of mass-producing sergeants for a gigantic army which in peacetime has in its ranks around five million men but which in case of war increases considerably in size. There is one shortcoming in this mass production. The selection of sergeants is not carried out by the commanders of the regular divisions but by local military agencies – the military commissariats and the mobilisation officers of the military districts. This selection cannot be, and is not, qualitative. When they receive instructions from their superiors the local authorities simply despatch several truckloads or trainloads of recruits.

Having received its 10,000 recruits, who are no different from any others, the training division has in five months to turn them into commanders and specialists. A certain number of the new recruits are sent straight off to the regular divisions on the grounds that they are not at all suitable for being turned into commanders. But the training division has very strict standards and cannot normally send more than five percent of its intake to regular divisions. Then, in exchange for those who were sent straight off, others arrive, but they are not much better in quality than those sent away, so the officers and sergeants of the training division have to exert all their ability, all their fury and inventiveness, to turn these people into sergeants.

The selection of future sergeants for *spetsnaz* takes place in a different way which is much more complicated and much more expensive. All the recruits to *spetsnaz* (after a very careful selection) join fighting units, where the company commander and platoon commanders put their young soldiers through a very tough course. This initial period of training for new recruits takes place away from other soldiers. During the course the company commander and the platoon commanders very carefully select (because they are vitally interested in the matter) those who appear to be born leaders. There are a lot of very simple devices for doing this. For example, a group of recruits is given the job of putting up a tent in a double quick time, but no leader is appointed among them. In a relatively simple operation someone has to coordinate the actions of the rest. A very short time is allowed for the work to be carried out and severe punishment is promised if the work is badly done or not completed on time. Within five minutes the group has appointed its own leader.

Again, a group may be given the task of getting from one place

to another by a very complicated and confused route without losing a single man. And again the group will soon appoint its own leader. Every day, every hour and every minute of the soldier's time is taken up with hard work, lessons, running, jumping, overcoming obstacles, and practically all the time the group is without a commander. In a few days of very intensive training the company commander and platoon commanders pick out the most intelligent, most imaginative, strongest, most brash and energetic in the group. After completing the course the majority of recruits finish up in sections and platoons of the same company, but the best of them are sent thousands of kilometres away to one of the *spetsnaz* training battalions where they become sergeants. Then they return to the companies they came from.

It is a very long road for the recruit. But it has one advantage: the potential sergeant is not selected by the local military authority nor even by the training unit, but by a regular officer at a very low level – at platoon or company level. What is more, the selection is made on a strictly individual basis and by the very same officer who will in five months' time receive the man he has selected back again, now equipped with sergeant's stripes.

It is impossible, of course, to introduce such a system into the whole of the Soviet Armed Forces. It involves transporting millions of men from one place to another. In all other branches the path of the future sergeant from where he lives follows this plan: training division – regular division. In *spetsnaz* the plan is: regular unit – training unit – regular unit.

There is yet another difference of principle. If any other branch of the services needs a sergeant the military commissariat despatches a recruit to the training division, which has to make him into a sergeant. But if *spetsnaz* needs a sergeant the company commander sends *three* of his *best* recruits to the *spetsnaz* training unit.

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The *spetsnaz* training battalion works on the principle that before you start giving orders, you have to learn to obey them. The whole of the thinking behind the training battalions can be put very simply. They say that if you make an empty barrel airtight and drag it down below the water and then let it go it shoots up and out above the surface of the water. The deeper it is dragged down the

faster it rises and the further it jumps out of the water. This is how the training battalions operate. Their task is to drag their ever-changing body of men deeper down.

Each *spetsnaz* training battalion has its permanent staff of officers, warrant officers and sergeants and receives its intake of 300–400 *spetsnaz* recruits who have already been through a recruit's course in various *spetsnaz* units.

The regime in the normal Soviet training divisions can only be described as brutal. I experienced it first as a student in a training division. I have already described the conditions within *spetsnaz*. To appreciate what conditions are like in a *spetsnaz* training battalion, the brutality has to be multiplied many times over.

In the *spetsnaz* training battalions the empty barrel is dragged so far down into the deep that it is in danger of bursting from external pressure. A man's dignity is stripped from him to such an extent that it is kept constantly at the very brink, beyond which lies suicide or the murder of his officer. The officers and sergeants of the training battalions are, every one of them, enthusiasts for their work. Anyone who does not like this work will not stand it for so long but goes off voluntarily to other easier work in *spetsnaz* regular units. The only people who stay in the training battalions are those who derive great pleasure from their work. Their work is to issue orders by which they make or break the strongest of characters. The commander's work is constantly to see before him dozens of men, each of whom has one thought in his head: to kill himself or to kill his officer? The work for those who enjoy it provides complete moral and physical satisfaction, just as a stuntman might derive satisfaction from leaping on a motorcycle over nineteen coaches. The difference between the stuntman risking his neck and the commander of a *spetsnaz* training unit lies in the fact that the former experiences his satisfaction for a matter of a few seconds, while the latter experiences it all the time.

Every soldier taken into a training battalion is given a nickname, almost invariably sarcastic. He might be known as The Count, The Duke, Caesar, Alexander of Macedon, Louis XI, Ambassador, Minister of Foreign Affairs, or any variation on the theme. He is treated with exaggerated respect, not given orders, but asked for his opinion:

'Would Your Excellency be of a mind to clean the toilet with his toothbrush?'

'Illustrious Prince, would you care to throw up in public what you ate at lunch?'

In *spetsnaz* units men are fed much better than in any other units of the armed forces, but the workload is so great that the men are permanently hungry, even if they do not suffer the unofficial but very common punishment of being forced to empty their stomachs:

'You're on the heavy side, Count, after your lunch! Would you care to stick two fingers down your throat? That'll make things easier!'

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The more humiliating the forms of punishment a sergeant thinks up for the men under him, and the more violently he attacks their dignity, the better. The task of the training battalions is to crush and completely destroy the individual, however strong a character he may have possessed, and to fashion out of that person a type to fit the standards of *spetsnaz*, a type who will be filled with an explosive charge of hatred and spite and a craving for revenge.

The main difficulty in carrying out this act of human engineering is to turn the fury of the young soldier in the right direction. He has to have been reduced to the lowest limits of his dignity and then, at precisely the point when he can take no more, he can be given his sergeant's stripes and sent off to serve in a regular unit. There he can begin to work off his fury on his own subordinates, or better still on the enemies of Communism.

The training units of *spetsnaz* are a place where they tease a recruit like a dog, working him into a rage and then letting him off the leash. It is not surprising that fights inside *spetsnaz* are a common occurrence. Everyone, especially those who have served in a *spetsnaz* training unit, bears within himself a colossal charge of malice, just as a thunder cloud bears its charge of electricity. It is not surprising that for a *spetsnaz* private, or even more so for a sergeant, war is just a beautiful dream, the time when he is at last allowed to release his full charge of malice.

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Apart from the unending succession of humiliations, insults and punishments handed out by the commanders, the man serving in a *spetsnaz* training unit has continually to wage a no less bitter battle against his own comrades who are in identical circumstances to his own.

In the first place there is a silent competition for pride of place, for the leadership in each group of people. In *spetsnaz*, as we have seen, this struggle has assumed open and very dramatic forms. Apart from this natural battle for first place there exists an even more serious incentive. It derives from the fact that for every sergeant's place in a *spetsnaz* training battalion there are three candidates being trained at the same time. Only the very best will be made sergeant at the end of five months. On passing out some are given the rank of junior sergeant, while others are not given any rank at all and remain as privates in the ranks. It is a bitter tragedy for a man to go through all the ordeals of a *spetsnaz* training battalion and not to receive any rank but to return to his unit as a private at the end of it.

The decision whether to promote a man to sergeant after he has been through the training course is made by a commission of GRU officers or the Intelligence Directorate of the military district in whose territory the particular battalion is stationed. The decision is made on the basis of the result of examinations conducted in the presence of the commission, on the main subjects studied: political training; the tactics of *spetsnaz* (including knowledge of the probable enemy and the main targets that *spetsnaz* operates); weapons training (knowledge of *spetsnaz* armament, firing from various kinds of weapons including foreign weapons, and the use of explosives); parachute training; physical training; and weapons of mass destruction and defence against them.

The commission does not distinguish between the soldiers according to where they have come from, but only according to their degree of readiness to carry out missions. Consequently, when the men who have passed out are returned to their units there may arise a lack of balance among them. For example, a *spetsnaz* company that sends nine privates to a training battalion in the hope of receiving three sergeants back after five months, could receive one sergeant, one junior sergeant and seven privates, or five sergeants, three junior sergeants and one private. This system has been introduced quite deliberately. The officer commanding a

regular company, with nine trained men to choose from, puts only the very best in charge of his sections. He can put anybody he pleases into the vacancies without reference to his rank. Privates who have been through the training battalion can be appointed commanders of sections. Sergeants and junior sergeants for whom there are not enough posts as commanders will carry out the work of privates despite their sergeant's rank.

The *spetsnaz* company commander may also have, apart from the freshly trained men, sergeants and privates who completed their training earlier but were not appointed to positions as commanders. Consequently the company commander can entrust the work of commanding sections to any of them, while all the new arrivals from the training battalion can be used as privates.

The private or junior sergeant who is appointed to command a section has to struggle to show his superiors that he really is worthy of that trust and that he really is the best. If he succeeds in doing so he will in due course be given the appropriate rank. If he is unworthy he will be removed. There are always candidates for his job.

This system has two objectives: the first is to have within the *spetsnaz* regular units a large reserve of commanders at the very lowest level. During a war *spetsnaz* will suffer tremendous losses. In every section there are always a minimum of two fully trained men capable of taking command at any moment; the second is to generate a continual battle between sergeants for the right to be a commander. Every commander of a section or deputy commander of a platoon can be removed at any time and replaced by someone more worthy of the job. The removal of a sergeant from a position of command is carried out on the authority of the company commander (if it is a separate *spetsnaz* company) or on the authority of the battalion commander or regiment. When he is removed the former commander is reduced to the status of a private soldier. He *may* retain his rank, or his rank may be reduced, or he may lose the rank of sergeant altogether.

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The training of officers for *spetsnaz* often take place at a special faculty of the Lenin Komsomol Higher Airborne Command School in Ryazan. Great care is taken over their selection for the school. The ones who join the faculty are among the very best.

The four years of gruelling training are also four years of continual testing and selection to establish whether the students are capable of becoming *spetsnaz* officers or not. When they have completed their studies at the special faculty some of them are posted to the airborne troops or the air assault troops. Only the very best are posted to *spetsnaz*, and even then a young officer can at any moment be sent off into the airborne forces. Only those who are absolutely suitable remain in *spetsnaz*. Other officers are appointed from among the men passing out from other command schools who have never previously heard of *spetsnaz*.

The heads of the GRU consider that special training is necessary for every function, except that of leader. A leader cannot be produced by even the best training scheme. A leader is born a leader and nobody can help him or advise him how to manage people. In this case advice offered by professors does not help; it only hinders. A professor is a man who has never been a leader and never will be, and nobody ever taught Hitler how to lead a nation. Stalin was thrown out of his theological seminary. Marshal Georgi Zhukov, the outstanding military leader of the Second World War, had a million men, and often several million, under his direct command practically throughout the war. Of all the generals and marshals at his level he was the only one who did not suffer a single defeat in battle. Yet he had no real military education. He did not graduate from a military school to become a junior officer; he did not graduate from a military academy to become a senior officer; and he did not graduate from the Academy of General Staff to become a general and later a marshal. But he became one just the same. There was Khalkhin-Gol, Yelnya, the counter-offensive before Moscow, Stalingrad, the lifting of the Leningrad blockade, Kursk, the crossing of the Dnieper, the Belorussian operation, and the Vistula-Oder and Berlin operations. What need had he of education? What could the professors teach him?

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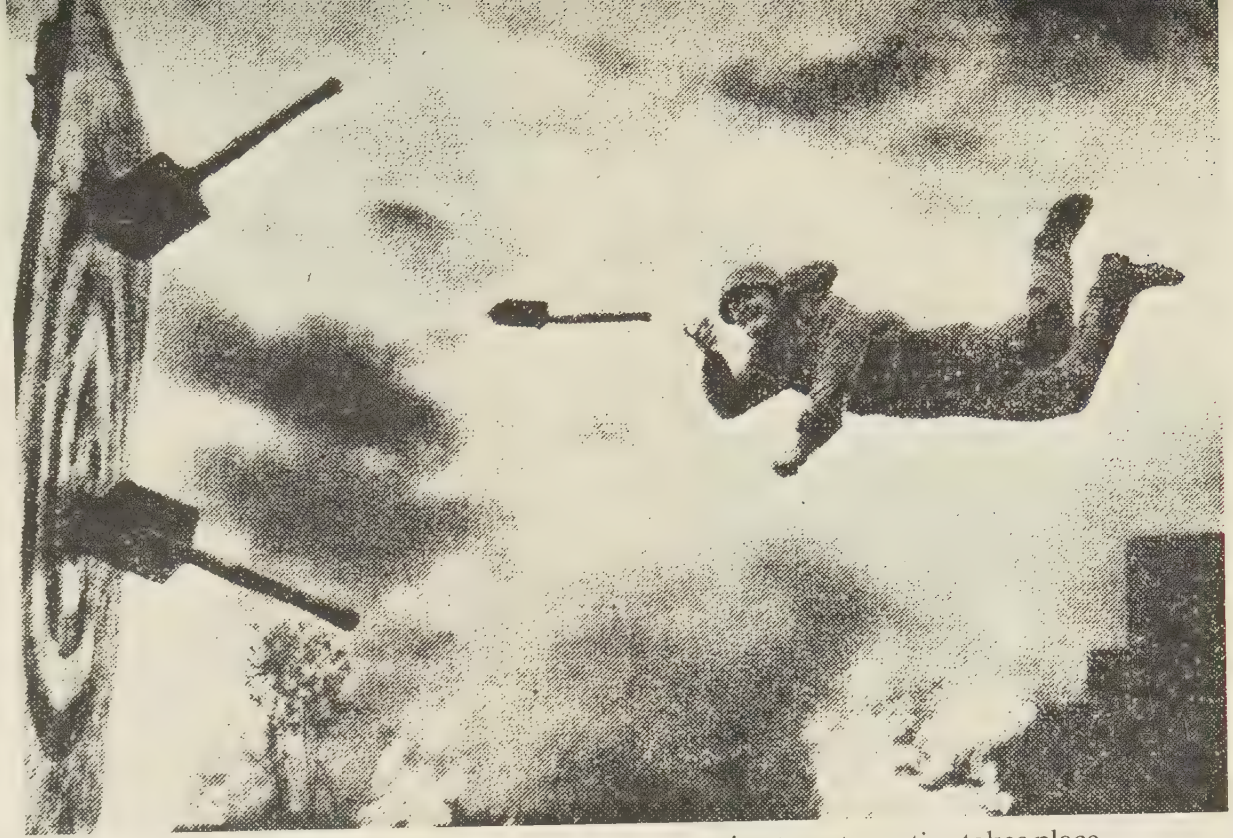
The headquarters of every military district has a Directorate for Personnel, which does a tremendous amount of work on officers' records and on the studying, selecting and posting of officers. On instructions from the chief of staff of the military district the



The spade, traditional weapon of *spetsnaz* units: target practice takes place under severe conditions.

Makhmud Umarov, *spetsna*
veteran and twice Olympic
medal winner.

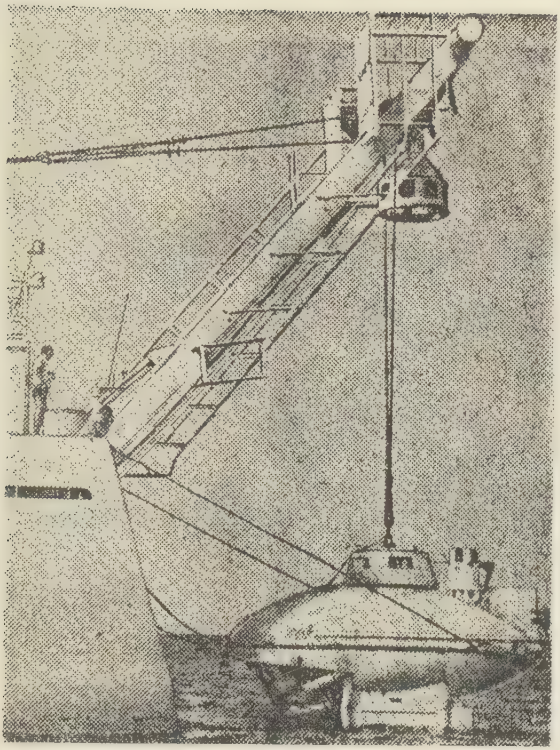
This Red Army major, veteran of Afghanistan, is wearing the combination of red lapel flashes and airborne troop emblems which distinguish a member of *spetsnaz* from a regular infantry officer or airborne officer.

Airborne *spetsnaz* troops in training.

An old photograph from the Second World War illustrating a technique that continues to be used. The caption reads 'I.P. Kulakov before releasing his dog at an (enemy) tank.' To the dog's back are attached 4 kg of explosives which will detonate as the metal contact touches the tank's armour.

A Soviet drawing from an official publication. Keeping an eye on the West's bases worldwide: this map shows the exact location of a US nuclear storage base at Yokosuka near Tokyo.

In Afghanistan, *spetsnaz* have used dogs for all kinds of purposes. This grou is returning from a mine-clearing operation.



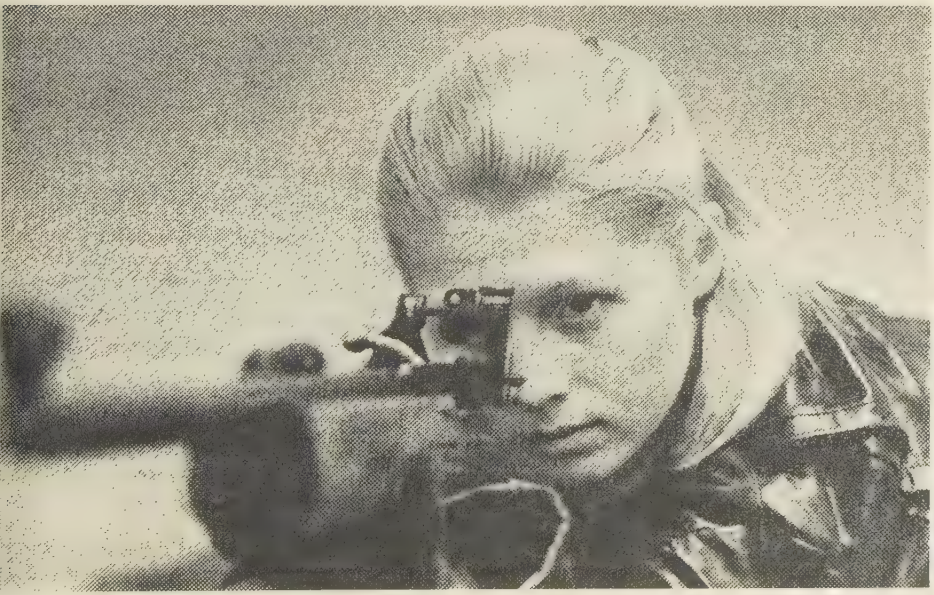
A Soviet midget submarine being launched from a civilian ship near Gibraltar 'for scientific purposes'.

Spetsnaz frogmen on board ship, observing the traditional ceremony of crossing the Equator.

Naval *spetsnaz* soldiers from the Baltic fleet.

At the Ryazon higher airborne training school: future *spetsnaz* officers are wading through snow-melt.

A member of DOSAAF, the military sponsored sports club which provides the Red Army with a potential 15 million reservists, including the best of them for *spetsnaz*.



Spetsnaz in action

Directorate for Personnel of each district will do a search for officers who come up to the *spetsnaz* standard.

The criteria which the Intelligence directorate sends to the Directorate of Personnel are top secret. But one can easily tell by looking at the officers of *spetsnaz* the qualities which they certainly possess.

The first and most important of them are of course a strong, unbending character and the marks of a born leader. Every year thousands of young officers with all kinds of specialities – from the missile forces, the tank troops, the infantry, the engineers and signallers pass through the Personnel directorate of each military district. Each officer is preceded by his dossier in which a great deal is written down. But that is not the decisive factor. When he arrives in the Directorate for Personnel the young officer is interviewed by several experienced officers specialising in personnel matters. It is in the course of these interviews that a man of really remarkable personality stands out, with dazzling clarity, from the mass of thousands of other strong-willed and physically powerful men. When the personnel officers discover him, the interviewing is taken over by other officers of the Intelligence directorate and it is they who will very probably offer him a suitable job.

But officers for *spetsnaz* are occasionally not selected when they pass through the Personnel directorate. They pass through the interviewing process without distinguishing themselves in any way, and are given jobs as commanders. Then stories may begin to circulate through the regiment, division, army and district to the effect that such and such a young commander is a brute, ready to attack anyone, but holds his own, performs miracles, has turned a backward platoon into a model unit, and so forth. The man is rapidly promoted and can be sure of being appointed to a penal battalion – not to be punished, but to take charge of the offenders. At this point the Intelligence directorate takes a hand in the matter. If the officer is in command of a penal platoon or company and he is tough enough to handle really difficult men without being scared of them or fearing to use his own strength, he will be weighed up very carefully for a job.

There is one other way in which officers are chosen. Every officer with his unit has to mount guard for the garrison and patrol the streets and railway stations in search of offenders. The military commandant of the town and the officer commanding the garrison

(the senior military man in town) see these officers every day. Day after day they take over the duty from another officer, perform it for twenty-four hours and then hand over to another officer. The system has existed for decades and all serving officers carry out these duties several times a year. It is the right moment to study their characters.

Say a drunken private is hauled into the guardroom. One officer will say, 'Pour ice-cold water over him and throw him in a cell!' Another officer will behave differently. When he sees the drunken soldier, his reaction will be along the lines of: 'Just bring him in here! Shut the door and cover him with a wet blanket (so as not to leave any marks). I'll teach him a lesson! Kick him in the guts! That'll teach him not to drink next time. Now lads, beat him up as best you can. Go on! I'd do the same to you, my boys! Now wipe him off with snow.' It needs little imagination to see which of the officers is regarded more favourably by his superiors. The Intelligence directorate doesn't need very many people – just the best.

The second most important quality is physical endurance. An officer who is offered a post is likely to be a runner, swimmer, skier or athlete in some form of sport demanding long and very concentrated physical effort. And a third factor is the physical dimensions of the man. Best of all is that he should be an enormous hulk with vast shoulders and huge fists. But this factor can be ignored if a man appears of small build and no broad shoulders but with a really strong character and a great capacity for physical endurance. Such a person is taken in, of course. The long history of mankind indicates that strong characters are met with no less frequently among short people than among giants.

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Any young officer can be invited to join *spetsnaz* irrespective of his previous speciality in the armed forces. If he possesses the required qualities of an iron will, an air of unquestionable authority, ruthlessness and an independent way of taking decisions and acting, if he is by nature a gambler who is not afraid to take a chance with anything, including his own life, then he will eventually be invited to the headquarters of the military district. He will be led along the endless corridors to a little office where he will be interviewed by a general and some senior officers. The young officer will not of

course know that the general is head of the Intelligence directorate of the military district or that the colonel next to him is head of the third department (*spetsnaz*) of the directorate.

The atmosphere of the interview is relaxed, with smiles and jokes on both sides. 'Tell us about yourself, lieutenant. What are your interests? What games do you play? You hold the divisional record on skis over ten kilometres? Very good. How did your men do in the last rifle-shooting test? How do you get along with your deputy? Is he a difficult chap? Uncontrolled character? Our information is that you tamed him. How did you manage it?'

The interview moves gradually on to the subject of the armed forces of the probable enemy and takes the form of a gentle examination.

'You have an American division facing your division on the front. The American division has "Lance" missiles. A nasty thing?'

'Of course, comrade general.'

'Just supposing, lieutenant, that you were chief of staff of the Soviet division, how would you destroy the enemy's missiles?'

'With our own 9K21 missiles.'

'Very good, lieutenant, but the location of the American missiles is not known.'

'I would ask the air force to locate them and possibly bomb them.'

'But there's bad weather, lieutenant, and the anti-aircraft defences are strong.'

'Then I would send forward from our division a deep reconnaissance company to find the missiles, cut the throats of the missile crew and blow up the missiles.'

'Not a bad idea. Very good, in fact. Have you ever heard, lieutenant, that there are units in the American Army known as the "Green Berets"?'

'Yes, I have heard.'

'What do you think of them?'

'I look at the question from two points of view – the political and the military.'

'Tell us both of them, please.'

'They are mercenary cutthroats of American capitalism, looters, murderers and rapists. They burn down villages and massacre the inhabitants, women, children and old people.'

'Enough. Your second point of view?'

'They are marvellously well-trained units for operating behind the enemy's lines. Their job is to paralyse the enemy's system of command and control. They are a very powerful and effective instrument in the hands of commanders. . . .'

'Very well. So what would you think, lieutenant, if we were to organise something similar in our army?'

'I think, comrade general, that it would be a correct decision. I am sure, comrade general, that that is our army's tomorrow.'

'It's the army's today, lieutenant. What would you say if we were to offer you the chance to become an officer in these troops? The discipline is like iron. Your authority as a commander would be almost absolute. You would be the one taking the decisions, not your superiors for you.'

'If I were to be offered such an opportunity, comrade general, I would accept.'

'All right, lieutenant, now you can go back to your regiment. Perhaps you will receive an offer. Continue your service and forget this conversation took place. You realise, of course, what will happen to you if anybody gets to know about what we have discussed?'

'I understand, comrade general.'

'We have informed your commanding officers, including the regimental commander, that you came before us as a candidate for posting to the Chinese frontier – to Mongolia, Afghanistan, the islands of the Arctic Ocean that sort of thing. Goodbye for now, lieutenant.'

'Goodbye, comrade general.'

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An officer who joins *spetsnaz* from another branch of the armed forces does not have to go through any additional training course. He is posted straight to a regular unit and is given command of a platoon. I was present many times at exercises where a young officer who had taken over a platoon knew a lot less about *spetsnaz* than many of his men and certainly his sergeants. But a young commander learns quickly, along with the privates. There is nothing to be ashamed of in learning. The officer could not know anything about the technique and tactics of *spetsnaz*.

It is not unusual for a young officer in these circumstances to begin a lesson, announce the subject and purpose of it, and then

order the senior sergeant to conduct the lesson while he takes up position in the ranks along with the young privates. His platoon will already have a sense of the firmness of the commander's character. The men will already know that the commander is the leader of the platoon, the one unquestionable leader. There are questions he cannot yet answer and equipment he cannot yet handle. But they all know that, if it is a question of running ten kilometres, their new commander will be among the first home, and if it is a question of firing from a weapon their commander will of course be the best. In a few weeks the young officer will make his first parachute jump along with the youngest privates. He will be given the chance to jump as often as he likes. The company commander and the other officers will help him to understand what he did not know before. At night he will read his top secret instructions and a month later he will be ready to challenge any of his sergeants to a contest. A few months later he will be the best in all matters and will teach his platoon by simply giving them the most confident of all commands: 'Do as I do!'

An officer who gets posted to *spetsnaz* from other branches of the forces without having had any special training is of course an unusual person. The officers commanding *spetsnaz* seek out such people and trust them. Experience shows that these officers without special training produce much better results than those who have graduated from the special faculty at the Higher Airborne Command school. There is nothing surprising or paradoxical about this. If Mikhail Koshkin had had special training in designing tanks he would never have created the T–34 tank, the best in the world. Similarly, if someone had decided to teach Mikhail Kalashnikov how to design a sub-machine-gun the teaching might easily have ruined a self-educated genius.

The officers commanding the GRU believe that strong and independent people must be found and told what to do, leaving them with the right to choose which way to carry out the task given them. That is why the instructions for *spetsnaz* tactics are so short. All Soviet regulations are in general much shorter than those in Western armies, and a Soviet commander is guided by them less frequently than his opposite member in the West.

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The officer of powerful build is only one type of *spetsnaz* officer. There is another type, whose build, width of shoulder and so forth

are not taken into account, although the man must be no less strong of character. This type might be called the 'intelligentsia' of *spetsnaz*, and it includes officers who are not directly involved with the men in the ranks and who work with their heads far more than with their hands.

There is, of course, no precise line drawn between the two types. Take, for example, the officer-interpreters who would seem to belong to the 'intelligentsia' of *spetsnaz*. There is an officer-interpreter, with a fluent knowledge of at least two foreign languages, in every *spetsnaz* company. His contact with the men in the company exists mainly because he teaches them foreign languages. But, as we know, this is not a subject that takes much time for the *spetsnaz* soldier. The interpreter is constantly at the company commander's side, acting as his unofficial adjutant. At first glance he is an 'intellectual'. But that is just the first impression. The fact is that the interpreter jumps along with the company and spends many days with it plodding across marshes and mountains, sand and snow. The interpreter is the first to drive nails into the heads of enemy prisoners to get the necessary information out of them. That is his work: to drag out fingernails, cut tongues in half (known as 'making a snake') and stuff hot coals into prisoners' mouths. Military interpreters for the Soviet armed forces are trained at the Military Institute.

Among the students at the Institute there are those who are physically strong and tough, with strong nerves and characters of granite. These are the ones invited to join *spetsnaz*. Consequently, although the interpreter is sometimes regarded as a representative of the 'intelligentsia', it is difficult to distinguish him by appearance from the platoon commanders of the company in which he serves. His job is not simply to ask questions and wait for an answer. His job to get the *right* answer. Upon that depends the success of the mission and the lives of an enormous number of people. He has to force the prisoner to talk if he does not want to, and having received an answer the interpreter must extract from the prisoner confirmation that it is the only right answer. That is why he has to apply not very 'intellectual' methods to his prisoner. With that in mind the interpreters in *spetsnaz* can be seen as neither commanders nor intellectuals, but a link between the two classes.

Pure representatives of *spetsnaz* 'intelligentsia' are found among the officers of the *spetsnaz* intelligence posts. They are selected

from various branches, and their physical development is not a key factor. They are officers who have already been through the military schools and have served for not less than two years. After posting to the third faculty of the Military-Diplomatic Academy, they work in intelligence posts (RPs) and centres (RZs). Their job is to look for opportunities for recruitment and to direct the agent network. Some of them work with the agent-informer network, some with the *spetsnaz* network.

An officer working with the *spetsnaz* agent network is a *spetsnaz* officer in the full sense. But he is not dropped by parachute and he does not have to run, fight, shoot or cut people's throats. His job is to study the progress of thousands of people and discover among them individuals suitable for *spetsnaz*; to seek a way of approaching them and getting to know them; to establish and develop relations with them; and then to recruit them. These officers wear civilian clothes most of the time, and if they have to wear military uniform they wear the uniform of the branch in which they previously served: artillery, engineering troops, the medical service. Or they wear the uniform of the unit within which the secret intelligence unit of *spetsnaz* is concealed.

The senior command of *spetsnaz* consists of colonels and generals of the GRU who have graduated from one of the main faculties of the Military-Diplomatic Academy – that is, the first or second faculties, and have worked for many years in the central *apparat* of the GRU and in its *rezidenturas* abroad. Each one of them has a first-class knowledge of a country or group of countries because of working abroad for a long time. If there is a possibility of continuing to work abroad he will do so. But circumstances may mean that further trips abroad are impossible. In that case he continues to serve in the central *apparat* of the GRU or in an Intelligence directorate of a military district, fleet or group of forces. He then has control of all the instruments of intelligence, including *spetsnaz*.

I frequently came across people of this class. In every case they were men who were silent and unsociable. They have elegant exteriors, good command of foreign languages and refined manners. They hold tremendous power in their hands and know how to handle authority.

Some however, are men who have never attended the Academy and have never been in countries regarded as potential enemies.

They have advanced upwards thanks to their inborn qualities, to useful contacts which they know how to arrange and support, to their own striving for power, and to their continual and successful struggle for power which is full of cunning tricks and tremendous risks. They are intoxicated by power and the struggle for power. It is their only aim in life and they go at it, scrambling over the slippery slopes and summits. One of the elements of success in their life's struggle is of course the state of the units entrusted to them and their readiness at any moment to carry out any mission set by the higher command. No senior official in *spetsnaz* can be held up by considerations of a moral, juridical or any other kind. His upward flight or descent depends entirely on how a mission is carried out. You may be sure that *any* mission will be carried out at *any* cost and by *any* means.

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I often hear it said that the Soviet soldier is a very bad soldier because he serves for only two years in the army. Some Western experts consider it impossible to produce a good soldier in such a short time.

It is true that the Soviet soldier is a conscript, but it must be remembered that he is conscript in a totally militarised country. It is sufficient to remember that even the leaders of the party in power in the Soviet Union have the military ranks of generals and marshals. The whole of Soviet society is militarised and swamped with military propaganda. From a very early age Soviet children engage in war games in a very serious way, often using real sub-machine guns (and sometimes even fighting tanks), under the direction of officers and generals of the Soviet Armed Forces.

Those children who show a special interest in military service join the Voluntary Society for Co-operation with the Army, Air Force and Fleet, known by its Russian initial letters as DOSAAF. DOSAAF is a paramilitary organisation with 15 million members who have regular training in military trades and engage in sports with a military application. DOSAAF not only trains young people for military service; it also helps reservists to maintain their qualifications after they have completed their service. DOSAAF has a colossal budget, a widespread network of airfields and training centres and clubs of various sizes and uses which carry out elementary and advanced training of military specialists of every

possible kind, from snipers to radio operators, from fighter pilots to underwater swimmers, from glider pilots to astronauts, and from tank drivers to the people who train military doctors.

Many outstanding Soviet airmen, the majority of the astronauts (starting with Yuri Gagarin), famous generals and European and world champions in military types of sport began their careers in DOSAAF, often at the age of fourteen.

The men in charge of DOSAAF locally are retired officers, generals and admirals, but the men in charge at the top of DOSAAF are generals and marshals on active service. Among the best-known leaders of the society were Army-General A. L. Getman, Marshal of the Air Force A. I. Pokryshkin, Army-General D. D. Lelyushenko and Admiral of the Fleet G. Yegorov. Traditionally the top leadership of DOSAAF includes leaders of the GRU and *spetsnaz*. At the present time (1986), for example, the first deputy chairman of DOSAAF is Colonel-General A. Odintsev. As long ago as 1941 he was serving in a *spetsnaz* detachment on the Western Front. The detachment was under the command of Artur Sprogis. Throughout his life Odintsev has been directly connected with the GRU and terrorism. At the present time his main job is to train young people of both sexes for the ordeal of fighting a war. The most promising of them are later sent to serve in *spetsnaz*.

When we speak about the Soviet conscript soldiers, and especially those who were taken into *spetsnaz*, we must remember that each one of them has already been through three or four years of intensive military training, has already made parachute jumps, fired a sub-machine-gun and been on a survival course. He has already developed stamina, strength, drive and the determination to conquer. The difference between him and a regular soldier in the West lies in the fact that the regular soldier is paid for his efforts. Our young man gets no money. He is a fanatic and an enthusiast. He has to pay himself (though only a nominal sum) for being taught how to use a knife, a silenced pistol, a spade and explosives.

After completing his service in *spetsnaz* the soldier either becomes a regular soldier or he returns to 'peaceful' work and in his spare time attends one of the many DOSAAF clubs. Here is a typical example: Sergei Chizhik was born in 1965. While still at school he joined the DOSAAF club. He made 120 parachute

jumps. Then he was called into the Army and served with special troops in Afghanistan. He distinguished himself in battle, and completed his service in 1985. In May 1986 he took part in a DOSAAF team in experiments in surviving in Polar conditions. As one of a group of Soviet 'athletes' he dropped by parachute on the North Pole.

DOSAAF is a very useful organisation for *spetsnaz* in many ways. The Soviet Union has signed a convention undertaking not to use the Antarctic for military purposes. But in the event of war it will of course be used by the military, and for that reason the corresponding experience has to be gained. That is why the training for a parachute drop on the South Pole in the Antarctic is being planned out by *spetsnaz* but to be carried out by DOSAAF. The difference is only cosmetic: the men who make the jump will be the very same cutthroats as went through the campaigns in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. They are now considered to be civilians, but they are under the complete control of generals like Odintsev, and in wartime they will become the very same *spetsnaz* troops as we now label contemptuously 'conscripts'.

Chapter 8
The Agent Network

Soviet military intelligence controls an enormous number of secret agents who, in this context, are foreigners who have been recruited by the Soviet intelligence services and who carry out tasks for those services. They can be divided into two networks, the strategic and the operational. The first is recruited by the central *apparat* of the GRU and the GRU's numerous branches within the country and abroad. It works for the General Staff of the armed forces of the USSR and its agents are recruited mainly in the capitals of hostile states or in Moscow. The second is recruited by the intelligence directorates of fronts, fleets, groups of forces, military districts and the intelligence departments of armies and flotillas, independently of the central GRU *apparat*, and its agents serve the needs of a particular front, fleet, army and so on. They are recruited mainly from the territory of the Soviet Union or from countries friendly to it.

The division of agents into strategic and operational networks does not in any way indicate a difference in quality. The central *apparat* of the GRU naturally has many more agents than any military district group of forces, in fact more than all the fleets, military district armies and so forth put together. They are, broadly speaking, people who have direct access to official secrets. Nevertheless the operational network has also frequently obtained information of interest not just to local commanders but also to the top Soviet leadership.

During the Second World War the information coming from the majority of foreign capitals was not of interest to the Soviet Union. Useful information came from a very small number of locations, but however vital it was, it was insufficient to satisfy wartime demands. Consequently the operational network of the armies, fronts and fleets increased many times in size during the war and came to be of greater importance than the strategic network of agents of the central GRU *apparat*. This could happen again in another full-scale war if, contrary to the military and political consensus on future wars, it proved to be long drawn-out.

The *spetsnaz* agent network, an *operational* one, works for every military district, group of forces, fleet and front (which all have in addition an information network). Recruitment of agents is carried out mainly from the territory of the Soviet Union and states friendly to it. The main places where *spetsnaz* looks out for likely candidates for recruitment are: major ports visited by foreign tourists; and among foreign students. *Spetsnaz* examines the correspondence of Soviet citizens and of citizens of the satellite countries and listens in to the telephone conversations in the hope of coming across interesting contacts between Soviet and East European citizens and people living in countries that *spetsnaz* is interested in. Usually a foreign person who has been recruited can be persuaded to recruit several other people who may never have been in the Soviet Union or had any contact with Soviet citizens. It sometimes happens that *spetsnaz* officers turn up in somebody else's territory and recruit agents. Most of them do not have diplomatic cover and do not recruit agents in the capital cities, but drop off from Soviet merchant and fishing vessels in foreign ports and appear in the foreign country as drivers of Soviet trucks, Aeroflot pilots or stewards of Soviet trains. One proven place for recruiting is a Soviet cruise ship: two weeks at sea, vodka, caviar, the *dolce vita*, pleasant company and the ability to talk without fearing the local police.

If the reader had access to real dossiers on the secret agents of *spetsnaz* he would be disappointed and probably shocked, because the agents of *spetsnaz* bear no resemblance to the fine, upstanding, young and handsome heroes of spy films. Soviet military intelligence is looking for an entirely different type of person as a candidate for recruitment. A portrait of an ideal agent for *spetsnaz*

emerges something like this: a man of between fifty-five and sixty-five years of age who has never served in the army, never had access to secret documents, does not carry or own a weapon, knows nothing about hand-to-hand fighting, does not possess any secret equipment and doesn't support the Comunists, does not read the newspapers, was never in the Soviet Union and has never met any Soviet citizens, leads a lonely, introspective life, far from other people, and is by profession a forester, fisherman, light-house-keeper, security guard or railwayman. In many cases such an agent will be a physical invalid. *Spetsnaz* is also on the lookout for women with roughly the same characteristics.

If *spetsnaz* has such a person in its network, that means: a. that he is certainly not under any suspicion on the part of the local police or security services; b. that in the event of any enquiries being made he will be the last person to be suspected; c. that there is practically nothing by which any suspicions could be confirmed, which in turn means that in peacetime the agent is almost totally guaranteed against the danger of failure or arrest; d. that in the event of war he will remain in the same place as he was in peacetime and not be taken into the army or the public service under the wartime mobilisation.

All this gives the *spetsnaz* agent network tremendous stability and vitality. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, and in the rules of intelligence gathering there are a lot of exceptions. You can come across many different kinds of people among the agents of *spetsnaz*, but still *spetsnaz* tries mainly to recruit people of just that type. What use are they to the organisation?

The answer is that they are formidably useful. The fact is that the acts of terrorism are carried out in the main by the professional athletes of *spetsnaz* who have been excellently trained for handling the most difficult missions. But the *spetsnaz* professionals have a lot of enemies when they get into a foreign country: helicopters and police dogs, the checking of documents at the roadside, patrols, even children playing in the street who miss very little and understand a lot. The *spetsnaz* commandos need shelter where they can rest for a few days in relative peace, where they can leave their heavy equipment and cook their own food.

So the principal task of *spetsnaz* agents is to prepare a safe hiding place in advance, long before the commandos arrive in the country. These are some examples of hiding places prepared by

spetsnaz agents. With GRU money a pensioner who is actually a *spetsnaz* agent buys a house on the outskirts of a town, and close to a big forest. In the house he builds, quite legally, a nuclear shelter with electric light, drains, water supply and a store of food. He then buys a car of a semi-military or military type, a Land Rover for example, which is kept permanently in the garage of the house along with a good store of petrol. With that the agent's work is done. He lives quietly, makes use of his country house and car, and in addition is paid for his services. He knows that at any moment he may have 'guests' in his house. But that doesn't frighten him. In case of arrest he can say that the commando troops seized him as a hostage and made use of his house, his shelter and car.

Or, the owner of a car dump takes an old, rusty railway container and drops it among the hundreds of scrap cars and a few motorcycles. For the benefit of the few visitors to the scrapyard who come in search of spare parts, the owner opens a little shop selling Coca-Cola, hot dogs, coffee and sandwiches. He always keeps a stock of bottled mineral water, tinned fish, meat and vegetables. The little shop also stocks comprehensive medical supplies.

Or perhaps the owner of a small firm buys a large, though old yacht. He tells his friends that he dreams of making a long journey under sail, which is why the yacht always has a lot of stores aboard. But he has no time to make the trip; what's more, the yacht is in need of repair which requires both time and money. So for the moment the old yacht lies there in a deserted bay among dozens of other abandoned yachts with peeling paint.

Large numbers of such places of refuge have been arranged. Places that can be used as shelters include caves, abandoned (or in some cases working) mines, abandoned industrial plants, city sewers, cemeteries (especially if they have family vaults), old boats, railway carriages and wagons, and so forth. Any place can be adapted as a shelter for the use of *spetsnaz* terrorists. But the place must be very well studied and prepared in advance. That is what the agents are recruited for.

This is not their only task. After the arrival of his 'guests' the agent can carry out many of their instructions: keeping an eye on what the police are doing, guarding the shelter and raising the alarm in good time, acting as a guide, obtaining additional

information about interesting objects and people. Apart from all that an agent may be recruited specially to carry out acts of terrorism, in which case he may operate independently under the supervision of one person from the GRU, in a group of agents like himself, or in collaboration with the professionals of *spetsnaz* who have come from the Soviet Union.

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The *spetsnaz* agent who is recruited to provide support for the operations of fighting groups in the way I have described, by acquiring a house and/or transport feels he is quite safe. The local police would have tremendous difficulty trying to run him to earth. Even if he were to be found and arrested it would be practically impossible to prove his guilt. But what the agent does not know is that danger threatens him from *spetsnaz* itself. Officers in the GRU who are discontented with the Communist regime may, either as a mark of protest or for other reasons, defect to the West. When they do, they are free to identify agents, including *spetsnaz* agents. Equally, once he has carried out his act of terrorism, the *spetsnaz* commando will destroy all traces of its work and any witnesses, including the agent who protected or helped the group in the first place. A man who is recruited as an agent to back up a commando group very rarely realises what will happen to him afterwards.

Thus if it is relatively easy to recruit a man to act as a 'sleeper', what about recruiting a foreigner to act as a real terrorist, prepared to commit murder, use explosives and fire buildings? Surely that is much more difficult?

The answer is that, surprisingly, it is not. A *spetsnaz* officer out to recruit agents for direct terrorist action has a wonderful base for his work in the West. There are a tremendous number of people who are discontented and ready to protest against absolutely anything. And while millions protest peacefully, some individuals will resort to any means to make their protest. The *spetsnaz* officer has only to find the malcontent who is ready to go to extremes.

A man who protests against the presence of American troops in Europe and sprays slogans on walls is an interesting subject. If he not only paints slogans but is also prepared to fire at an American general, should he be given the sub-machine-gun or an RPG–7

grenade-launcher to do the job, he is an exceptionally interesting person. His goals tally perfectly with those of the senior officers of the GRU.

In France protesters fired an RPG–7 grenade-launcher at the reactor of a nuclear power station. Where they got the Soviet-made weapon I do not know. Perhaps it was just lying there at the roadside. But if it was a *spetsnaz* officer who had the good fortune to meet those people and provide them with their hardware, he would without further ado have been given a Red Banner medal and promotion. The senior officers of the GRU have a particular dislike of Western nuclear power stations, which reduce the West's dependence on imported oil (including Soviet oil) and make it stronger and more independent. They are one of *spetsnaz*'s most important targets.

On another occasion a group of animal rights activists in the UK injected bars of chocolate with poison. If *spetsnaz* were able to contact that group, and there is every chance it might, it would be extremely keen (without, of course, mentioning its name) to suggest to them a number of even more effective ways of protesting. Activists, radicals, peace campaigners, green party members: as far as the leaders of the GRU are concerned, these are like ripe water-melons, green on the outside, but red on the inside – and mouth-watering.

So there is a good base for recruiting. There are enough discontented people in the West who are ready not only to kill others but also to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their own particular ideals which *spetsnaz* may exploit. The *spetsnaz* officer has only to find and take advantage of the malcontent who is ready to go to extremes.

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The *spetsnaz* network of agents has much in common with international terrorism, a common centre, for example – yet they are different things and must not be confused. It would be foolhardy to claim that international terrorism came into being on orders from Moscow. But to claim that, without Moscow's support, international terrorism would never have assumed the scale it has would not be rash. Terrorism has been born in a variety of situations, in various circumstances and in different kinds of soil. Local nationalism has always been a potent source, and the

Soviet Union supports it in any form, just as it offers concrete support to extremist groups operating within nationalist movements. Exceptions are made, of course, of the nationalist groups within the Soviet Union and the countries under its influence.

If groups of extremists emerge in areas where there is no sure Soviet influence, you may be sure that the Soviet Union will very shortly be their best friend. In the GRU alone there are two independent and very powerful bodies dealing with questions relating to extremists and terrorists. First, there is the 3rd Direction of the GRU which studies terrorist organisations and ways of penetrating them. Then there is the 5th Directorate which is in charge of all intelligence-gathering at lower levels, including that of *spetsnaz*.

The GRU's tactics toward terrorists are simple: never give them any orders, never tell them what to do. They are destroying Western civilisation: they know how to do it, the argument goes, so let them get on with it unfettered by petty supervision. Among them there are idealists ready to die for *their own* ideas. So let them die for them. The most important thing is to preserve their illusion that they are completely free and independent.

Moscow is an important centre of international terrorism, not because it is from Moscow that instructions are issued, but because selected terrorist groups or organisations which *ask for help* may be given it if little risk is attached to doing so. Moscow's deep involvement with terrorism is a serious political affair. One 'resistance movement' has to have more financial help, another less. One 'Red Army' must have modern weapons and an unlimited supply of ammunition, another one will do better with old weapons and a limited supply of ammunition. One movement is to be recognised, while another will be condemned in words but supported in practice. 'Independent' terrorists give little thought to where the money comes from with which they travel the countries of the world, or who provides the Kalashnikov submachine-guns and the cartridges to go with them, or who supplies the instructors who teach them and train them.

But just look at the 'independent' Palestinians: they virtually throw their ammunition away. And if one watches a film about the fighting in Afghanistan and then one from the streets of Beirut the difference is very striking. The Afghan resistance fighters count every round, whereas the groups fighting each other in the streets

of Beirut don't even bother to aim when they fire; they simply fire into the air in long bursts, although it means they are wasting someone else's money. Whose money is it?

When I was beginning my military service I was taught to count every round. Cartridges are metal and a lot of hard work. It is more difficult and more expensive to make a cartridge than to make a fountain pen. And another reason for being careful with ammunition is so that you are never without it at a critical moment. Supplying an army with ammunition is a complex logistical problem. If the transport carrying ammunition arrives even a few minutes after you have spent all your ammunition without thinking, then you are dead. But there are no such problems in Beirut. Nobody tells the conflicting groups what the ammunition costs. Nobody tells them the cost of the lives they cut off every day. Nobody mentions the danger that the regular supply of ammunition may be late. The suppliers are certain that it will not be late.

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The Soviet Union condemns the civil war in the Lebanon. But there is no need for it to condemn the war. All it has to do is hold back the next transport of ammunition, and war will cease.

Apart from military and financial support, the Soviet Union also provides the terrorists with aid in the form of training. Training centres have been set up in the Soviet Union for training terrorists from a number of different countries. Similar centres have been set up in the countries of Eastern Europe, in Cuba and elsewhere. I know the centre in Odessa very well. Officially it belongs to the 10th Chief Directorate of the General Staff which deals with the export of weapons, sends Soviet military advisers to foreign countries and trains foreigners to be fighters and terrorists. In the early 1960s this centre was a branch of the higher infantry officers' school. An intelligence faculty was formed in it for Soviet students, many of whom ended up in the GRU and *spetsnaz*, while the remainder of the huge area, classrooms and living quarters, was given over entirely to the centre for training foreign fighters. When I was in Odessa most of the people under training were intended for work in black Africa. Not all of them came from Africa, quite a lot of them were from Cuba, but that was where the majority were destined. The difference between the training and the living conditions of the Soviet and the foreign students was tremendous.

The foreigners were better fed and wore Soviet officers' field uniforms, though without any badges of rank. They had practically no theoretical tuition at all. But their practical training was very concentrated, even by Soviet standards. For them there was no shortage of ammunition. Shooting went on in their camp day and night.

The foreigners were kept in strict isolation. The only outsiders who could see them were the Soviet students and then only through the barbed wire. The total isolation had a bad effect on some of the foreign students. But since they could not break out of it, the Cuban minister of defence stepped in and ordered some girls to be sent from Cuba who were trained as nurses for partisan units at the Odessa centre. It was interesting to note that the soldiers were under training for one year and the officers for two years, but the nurses' training lasted ten years or more. At the end of their training the nurses were sent back to Cuba and some younger ones were sent to replace them. There were no more psychological problems at the training centre.

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Foreigners belonging to 'liberation movements' who turn up in the Soviet Union are not generally recruited by the Soviet intelligence services. Experience has shown that the terrorist who considers himself independent and who kills people because of *his own* beliefs is more effective than the one who fights on the orders of other people. For his own ideas the terrorist will take risks and sacrifice his life, but he is scarcely likely to do so merely on instructions from foreigners. So why recruit him?

But there are important exceptions. Every terrorist is studied carefully during his training, and among them will be noted the potential leaders and the born rebels who will not submit to any authority. Of equal importance are the students' weaknesses and ambitions, and their relationships with one another. Some time, many years ahead, one of them may become an important leader, but not one approved by Moscow, so it is vital to know in advance who his likely friends and enemies will be.

As the students are themselves studied during training, some emerge as exceptions among the crowd and as likely material for recruitment. Recruitment at the training centres is carried on simultaneously by two different GRU organisations. The 3rd

Direction recruits informers, who will subsequently remain inside the 'national liberation movements' and will pass on to the heads of the GRU the internal secrets of the movements. The 5th Directorate of the GRU recruits some of the students to be part of the *spetsnaz* network of agents. This is a fairly complicated process. Formally the candidate remains in his 'liberation movement' and works there. In fact he starts to operate on instructions from the GRU. It is a very delicate situation and all possible steps are taken to protect the reputation of the USSR in case of failure. With this aim in view the carefully selected candidate, unaware of his position, is transferred to training in one of the countries under Soviet influence. Recruitment then takes place, but not by Soviet Intelligence, rather by the Intelligence service of one of the Soviet satellite countries.

The recruitment of a full-blown terrorist is a very different matter from the recruitment of an informer-agent. The terrorist has to go through very tough training which becomes a daily, and a nightly, nightmare. He dreams of the training coming to an end: he yearns for the real thing. The instructors talk to him and ask him what he would like, as a terrorist, to do. The terrorist tells them. The instructors then 'think about it' and a few days later tell him it is not possible. The torture of the training continues. Again the question of what he wants to do is raised, and again he is turned down. Various reasons are given for refusing him: we value your life too highly to send you on such a risky mission; such an act might have unwanted repercussions on your family, your comrades, and so on. Thus the range of choice is gradually narrowed down until the terrorist suggests exactly what the heads of Soviet Military intelligence want. They 'think about it' for a few days and finally give their agreement in such a way that it does not appear to be something wanted by the GRU but rather a compromise or a concession to the terrorist: if he really thinks it necessary to do it, no obstacles will be put in his way.

I have of course simplified a process which is in practice a very complicated affair.

The reward for the GRU is that a terrorist doing work for *spetsnaz* does not, in the great majority of cases, suspect he is being used. He is utterly convinced that he is acting independently, of his own will and by his own choice. The GRU does not leave its signature or his fingerprints around.

Even in cases where it is not a question of individual terrorists but of experienced leaders of terrorist organisations, the GRU takes extraordinary steps to ensure that not only all outsiders but even the terrorist leader himself should not realise the extent of his subordination to *spetsnaz* and consequently to the GRU. The leader of the terrorists has a vast field of action and a wide choice. But there are operations and acts of terrorism on which *spetsnaz* will spend any amount of money, will provide any kind of weapon, will help in obtaining passports and will organise hiding places. But there are also terrorist acts for which *spetsnaz* has no money, no weapons, no reliable people and no hiding places. The leader of the terrorists is at complete liberty to choose the mission he wants, but without weapons, money and other forms of support his freedom to choose is suddenly severely curtailed.

Chapter 9
Weapons and Equipment

The standard issue of weapons to a *spetsnaz* is a sub-machine-gun, 400 rounds of ammunition, a knife, and six hand grenades or a light single-action grenade-launcher. During a drop by parachute the sub-machine gun is carried in such a way as not to interfere with the main (or the reserve) parachute opening correctly and promptly, and not to injure the parachute on landing. But the large number of fastenings make it impossible for the parachutist to use the gun immediately after landing. So he should not be left defenceless at that moment, the parachutist also carries a P–6 silent pistol. After my escape to the West I described this pistol to Western experts and was met with a certain scepticism. Today a great deal that I told the experts has been confirmed, and examples of the silent pistol have been found in Afghanistan. (*Jane's Defence Weekly* has published some excellent photographs and a description of this unusual weapon.) For noiseless shooting over big distances PBS silencers are used and some soldiers carry them on their sub-machine-guns.

Officers, radio-operators and cypher clerks have a smaller set of weapons: a short-barrelled sub-machine-gun (AKR) of 160 rounds, a pistol and a knife.

Apart from personal weapons a *spetsnaz* group carries collective weapons in the form of RPG–16D grenade-launchers, Strela–2 ground-to-air missiles, mines for various purposes, plastic explosive, snipers' rifles and other weapons. The unit learns how to

handle group weapons but does not keep them permanently with it: group weapons are held in the *spetsnaz* stores, and the quantity needed by the unit is determined before each operation. Operations can often be carried out simply with each man's personal weapons.

A group which sets out on an operation with only personal weapons can receive the group weapons it needs later, normally by parachute. And in case of pursuit a group may abandon not only the group weapons but some of their personal weapons as well. For most soldiers, to lose their weapons is an offence punished by a stretch in a penal battalion. But *spetsnaz*, which enjoys special trust and operates in quite unusual conditions, has the privilege of resolving the dilemma for itself although every case is, of course, later investigated. The commander and his deputy have to demonstrate that the situation really was critical.

■ ■ ■

Unlike the airborne and the air assault forces, *spetsnaz* does not have any heavy weapons like artillery, mortars or BMD fighting vehicles. But 'does not have' does not mean 'does not use'.

On landing in enemy territory a group may begin its operation by capturing a car or armoured troop-carrier belonging to the enemy. Any vehicle, including one with a red cross on it, is fair game for *spetsnaz*. It can be used for a variety of purposes: for getting quickly away from the drop zone, for example, or for transporting the group's mobile base, or even for mounting the assault on an especially important target. In the course of exercises on Soviet territory *spetsnaz* groups have frequently captured tanks and used them for attacking targets. An ideal situation is considered to be when the enemy uses tanks to guard especially important installations, and *spetsnaz* captures one or several of them and immediately attacks the target. In that case there is no need for a clumsy slow-moving tank to make the long trip to its target.

Many other types of enemy weapons, including mortars and artillery, can be used as heavy armament. The situation may arise in the course of a war where a *spetsnaz* group operating on its own territory will obtain the enemy's heavy weapons captured in battle, then get through to enemy territory and operate in his rear in the guise of genuine fighting units. This trick was widely used by the Red Army in the Civil War.

The Soviet high command even takes steps to acquire foreign weapons in peacetime. In April 1985 four businessmen were arrested in the USA. Their business was officially dealing in arms. Their illegal business was also dealing in arms, and they had tried to ship 500 American automatic rifles, 100,000 rounds of ammunition and 400 night-vision sights to countries of the Soviet bloc.

Why should the Soviet Union need American weapons in such quantities? To help the national liberation armies which it sponsors? For that purpose the leadership has no hesitation in providing Kalashnikov automatics, simpler and cheaper, with no problems of ammunition supply. Perhaps the 500 American rifles were for studying and copying? But the Soviet Union has captured M–16 rifles from many sources, Vietnam for one. They have already been studied down to the last detail. And there is no point in copying them since, in the opinion of the Soviet high command, the Kalashnikov meets all its requirements.

It is difficult to think of any other reason for such a deal than that they were for equipping *spetsnaz* groups. Not for all of them, of course, but for the groups of professional athletes, especially those who will be operating where the M–16 rifle is widely used and where consequently there will be plenty of ammunition for it to be found.

The quantity of rifles, sights and rounds of ammunition is easy to explain: 100 groups of five men each, in which everybody except the radio-operator has a night-sight (four to a group); for each rifle half a day's requirements (200 rounds), the rest to be taken from the enemy. American sights are used mainly because batteries and other essential spares can be obtained from the enemy.

This is clearly not the only channel through which standard American arms and ammunition are obtained. We know about the businessmen who have been arrested. There are no doubt others who have not been arrested yet.

■ ■ ■

The weapons issued to *spetsnaz* are very varied, covering a wide range, from the guitar string (used for strangling someone in an attack from behind) to small portable nuclear changes with a TNT equivalent of anything from 800 to 2000 tons. The *spetsnaz* arsenal includes swiftly acting poisons, chemicals and bacteria. At the

same time the mine remains the favourite weapon of *spetsnaz*. It is not by chance that the predecessors of the modern *spetsnaz* men bore the proud title of guards minelayers. Mines are employed at all stages of a group's operations. Immediately after a landing, mines may be laid where the parachutes are hidden and later the group will lay mines along the roads and paths by which they get away from the enemy. The mines very widely employed by *spetsnaz* in the 1960s and 1970s were the MON–50, MON–100, MON–200 and the MON–300. The MON is a directional anti-personnel mine, and the figure indicates the distance the fragments fly. They do not fly in different directions but in a close bunch in the direction the minelayer aims them. It is a terrible weapon, very effective in a variety of situations. For example, if a missile installation is discovered and it is not possible to get close to it, a MON–300 can be used to blow it up. They are at their most effective if the explosion is aimed down a street, road, forest path, ravine, gorge or valley. MON mines are often laid so that the target is covered by crossfire from two or more directions.

There are many other kinds of mines used by *spetsnaz*, each of which has been developed for a special purpose: to blow up a railway bridge, to destroy an oil storage tank (and at the same time ignite the contents), and to blow up constructions of cement, steel, wood, stone and other materials. It is a whole science and a real art. The *spetsnaz* soldier has a perfect command of it and knows how to blow up very complicated objects with the minimal use of explosive. In case of need he knows how to make explosives from material lying around. I have seen a *spetsnaz* officer make several kilograms of a sticky brown paste out of the most inoffensive and apparently non-explosive materials in about an hour. He also made the detonator himself out of the most ordinary things that a *spetsnaz* soldier carries with him – an electric torch, a razor blade which he made into a spring, a box of matches and finally the bullet from a tracer cartridge. The resulting mechanism worked perfectly. In some cases simpler and more accessible things can be used – gas and oxygen balloons of paraffin with the addition of filings of light metals. A veteran of this business, Colonel Starinov, recalls in his memoirs making a detonator out of one matchbox.

■ ■ ■

On the subject of mines, we must mention a terrible *spetsnaz* weapon known as the Strela-Blok. This weapon was used in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. It is quite possible that by now it has been very substantially improved. In a sense it can be described as an anti-aircraft mine, because it operates on the same principle as the mine laid at the side of a road which acts against a passing vehicle. It is related to mines which are based on portable grenade-launchers which fire at the side of a tank or an armoured personnel carrier.

The Strela-Blok is an ordinary Soviet Strela–2 portable missile (a very exact copy of the American Red Eye). A *spetsnaz* group carries one or several of these missiles with it. In the area of a major airfield the launch tube is attached to a tall tree (or the roof of a building, a tall mast, a hayrick) and camouflaged. The missile is usually installed at a short distance from the end of the runway. That done, the group leaves the area. The missile is launched automatically. A clockwork mechanism operates first, allowing the group to retire to a safe distance, then, when the set time has run out (it could be anything from an hour to several days) a very simple sound detector is switched on which reacts to the noise of an aircraft engine of a particular power. So long as the engine noise is increasing nothing happens (it means the aircraft is coming nearer), but as soon as the noise decreases the mechanism fires. The infra-red warhead reacts to the heat radiated by the engine, follows the aircraft and catches up with it.

Imagine yourself to be the officer commanding an aircraft base. One plane (perhaps with a nuclear bomb on board) is shot down by a missile as it takes off. You cancel all flights and despatch your people to find the culprits. They of course find nobody. Flights are resumed and your next plane is shot down on take-off. What will you do then? What will you do if the group has set up five Strela-Blok missiles around the base and anti-infantry mines on the approaches to them? How do you know that there are only five missiles?

■ ■ ■

Another very effective *spetsnaz* weapon is the RPO–A flame-thrower. It weighs eleven kilograms and has a single action. Developed in the first half of the 1970s, it is substantially superior to any flame-throwers produced at that time in any other country.

The principal difference lies in the fact that the foreign models of the time threw a stream of fire at a range of about thirty metres, and a considerable part of the fuel was burnt up in the trajectory.

The RPO–A, however, fires not a stream but a capsule, projected out of a lightweight barrel by a powder charge. The inflammable mixture flies to the target in a capsule and bursts into flame only when it strikes the target. The RPO–A has a range of more than 400 metres, and the effectiveness of one shot is equal to that of the explosion of a 122 mm howitzer shell. It can be used with special effectiveness against targets vulnerable to fire – fuel stores, ammunition dumps, and missiles and aircraft standing on the ground.

■ ■ ■

A more powerful *spetsnaz* weapon is the GRAD–V multiple rocket-launcher, a system of firing in salvos developed for the airborne forces. There the weapon can be mounted on the chassis of a GAZ–66 truck. It has twelve launching tubes which fire jet-propelled shells. But apart from the vehicle-mounted version, GRAD–V is produced in a portable version. In case of need the airborne units are issued with separate tubes and the shells to go with them. The tube is set up on the ground in the simplest of bases. It is aimed in the right direction and fired. Several separate tubes are usually aimed at one target and fired at practically the same time. Fired from a vehicle its accuracy is very considerable, but from the ground it is not so great. But in either case the effect is very considerable. The GRAD–V is largely a weapon for firing to cover a wide area and its main targets are: communications centres, missile batteries, aircraft parks and other very vulnerable targets.

The airborne forces use both versions of the GRAD–V. *Spetsnaz* uses only the second, portable version. Sometimes, to attack a very important target, for example a submarine in its berth, a major *spetsnaz* unit may fire GRAD–V shells simultaneously from several dozen or even hundreds of tubes.

■ ■ ■

In *spetsnaz* the most up-to-date weapons exist side by side with a weapon which has long been forgotten in all other armies or relegated to army museums. One such weapon is the crossbow.

However amusing the reader may find this, the crossbow is in fact a terrible weapon which can put an arrow right through a man at a great distance and with great accuracy. Specialists believe that, at the time when the crossbow was competing with the musket, the musket came off best only because it made such a deafening noise that this had a greater effect on the enemy than the soft whistle of an arrow from a crossbow. But in speed of firing, accuracy and reliability the crossbow was superior to the musket, smaller in size and weight, and killed people just as surely as the musket. Because it made no noise when fired it did not have the same effect as a simultaneous salvo from a thousand muskets.

But that noiseless action is exactly what *spetsnaz* needs today. The modern crossbow is, of course, very different in appearance and construction from the crossbows of previous centuries. It has been developed using the latest technology. It is aimed by means of optical and thermal sights of a similar quality to those used on modern snipers' rifles. The arrows are made with the benefit of the latest research in ballistics and aerodynamics. The bow itself is a very elegant affair, light, reliable and convenient. To make it easy to carry it folds up.

The crossbow is not a standard weapon in *spetsnaz*, although enormous attention is given in the athletic training units to training men to handle the weapon. In case of necessity a *spetsnaz* group may be issued with one or two crossbows to carry out some special mission in which a man has to be killed without making any noise at all and in darkness at a distance of several dozen metres. It is true that the crossbow can in no way be considered a rival to the sniper's rifle. The Dragunov sniper's rifle is a marvellous standard *spetsnaz* weapon. But if you fit a silencer to a sniper's rifle it greatly reduces its accuracy and range. For shooting accurately and noiselessly, sniper's rifles have been built with a 'heavy barrel', in which the silencer is an organic part of the weapon. This is a wonderful and a reliable weapon. Nevertheless the officers commanding the GRU consider that a *spetsnaz* commander must have a very wide collection of weapons from which he can choose for a particular situation. It is possible, indeed certain, that special situations will arise, in which the commander preparing for an operation will want to choose a rather unusual weapon.

■ ■ ■

The most frightening, demoralising opponent of the *spetsnaz* soldier has always been and always will be the dog. No electronic devices and no enemy firepower has such an effect on his morale as the appearance of dogs. The enemy's dogs always appear at the most awkward moment, when a group exhausted by a long trek is enjoying a brief uneasy sleep, when their legs are totally worn out and their ammunition is used up.

Surveys conducted among soldiers, sergeants and officers in *spetsnaz* produce the same answer again and again: the last thing they want to come up against is the enemy's dogs.

The heads of the GRU have conducted some far-reaching researches into this question and come to the conclusion that the best way to deal with dogs is to use dogs oneself. On the south-eastern outskirts of Moscow there is the Central Red Star school of military dog training, equipped with enormous kennels.

The Central Military school trains specialists and rears and trains dogs for many different purposes in the Soviet Army, including *spetsnaz*. The history of using dogs in the Red Army is a rich and very varied one. In the Second World War the Red Army used 60,000 of its own dogs in the fighting. This was possible, of course, only because of the existence of the Gulag, the enormous system of concentration camps in which the rearing and training of dogs had been organised on an exceptionally high level in terms of both quantity and quality.

To the figure of 60,000 army dogs had to be added an unknown, but certainly enormous, number of transport dogs. Transport dogs were used in winter time (and throughout the year in the north) for delivering ammunition supplies to the front line, evacuating the wounded and similar purposes. The service dogs included only those which worked, not in a pack but as individuals, carrying out different, precisely defined functions for which each one had been trained. The Red Army's dogs had respected military trades: *razvedka*; searching for wounded on the battle field; delivery of official messages. The dogs were used by the airborne troops and by the guards minelayers (now *spetsnaz*) for security purposes. But the trades in which the Red Army's dogs were used on the largest scale were mine detection and destroying tanks.

Even as early as 1941 special service units (*Spets sluzhba*) started to be formed for combating the enemy's tanks. Each unit consisted of four companies with 126 dogs in each company, making 504

dogs in each unit. Altogether during the war there were two special service regiments formed and 168 independent units, battalions, companies and platoons.

The dogs selected for the special service units were strong and healthy and possessed plenty of stamina. Their training was very simple. First, they were not fed for several days, and then they began to receive food near some tanks: the meat was given to them from the tank's lower hatch. So the dog learned to go beneath the tank to be fed. The training sessions quickly became more elaborate. The dogs were unleashed in the face of tanks approaching from quite considerable distances and taught to get under the tank, not from the front but from the rear. As soon as the dog was under the tank, it stopped and the dog was fed. Before a battle the dog would not be fed. Instead, an explosive charge of between 4 and 4.6 kg with a pin detonator was attached to it. It was then sent under the enemy tanks.

Anti-tank dogs were employed in the biggest battles, before Moscow, before Stalingrad, and at Kursk. The dogs destroyed a sufficient number of tanks for the survivors to be considered worthy of the honour of taking part in the victory parade in Red Square.

The war experience was carefully analysed and taken into account. The dog as a faithful servant of man in war has not lost its importance, and *spetsnaz* realises that a lot better than any other branch of the Soviet Army. Dogs perform a lot of tasks in the modern *spetsnaz*. There is plenty of evidence that *spetsnaz* has used them in Afghanistan to carry out their traditional tasks – protecting groups from surprise attack, seeking out the enemy, detecting mines, and helping in the interrogation of captured Afghan resistance fighters. They are just as mobile as the men themselves, since they can be dropped by parachute in special soft containers.

In the course of a war in Europe *spetsnaz* will use dogs very extensively for carrying out the same functions, and for one other task of exceptional importance – destroying the enemy's nuclear weapons. It is a great deal easier to teach a dog to get up to a missile or an aircraft unnoticed than it is to get it to go under a roaring, thundering tank. As before, the dog would carry a charge weighing about 4 kg, but charges of that weight are today much more powerful than they were in the last war, and the detonators are incomparably more sophisticated and foolproof than they were

then. Detonators have been developed for this kind of charge which detonate only on contact with metal but do not go off on accidental contact with long grass, branches or other objects. The dog is an exceptionally intelligent animal which with proper training quickly becomes capable of learning to seek out, identify correctly and attack important targets. Such targets include complicated electronic equipment, aerials, missiles, aircraft, staff cars, cars carrying VIPs, and occasionally individuals. All of this makes the *spetsnaz* dog a frightening and dangerous enemy.

Apart from everything else, the presence of dogs with a *spetsnaz* group appreciably raises the morale of the officers and the men. Some especially powerful and vicious dogs are trained for one purpose alone – to guard the group and to destroy the enemy's dogs if they appear.

■ ■ ■

In discussing *spetsnaz* weapons we must mention also the 'invisible weapon' – sambo. Sambo is a kind of fighting without rules which was originated in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and has since been substantially developed and improved.

The originator of sambo was B. S. Oshchepkov, an outstanding Russian sportsman. Before the Revolution he visited Japan where he learnt judo. Oshchepkov became a black belt and was a personal friend of the greatest master of this form of fighting, Jigaro Kano, and others. During the Revolution Oshchepkov returned to Russia and worked as a trainer in special Red Army units.

After the Civil War Oshchepkov was made senior instructor in the Red Army in various forms of unarmed combat. He worked out a series of ways in which a man could attack or defend himself against one or several opponents armed with a variety of weapons. The new system was based on karate and judo, but Oshchepkov moved further and further away from the traditions of the Japanese and Chinese masters and created new tricks and combinations of his own.

Oshchepkov took the view that one had to get rid of all artificial limitations and rules. In real combat nobody observes any rules, so why introduce them artifically at training sessions and so penalise the sportsmen? Oshchepkov firmly rejected all the noble rules of chivalry and permitted his pupils to employ any tricks and rules. In

order that a training session should not become a bloodbath Oshchepkov instructed his pupils only to imitate some of the more violent holds although in real combat they were permitted. Oshchepkov brought his system of unarmed combat up to date. He invented ways of fighting opponents who were armed, not with Japanese bamboo sticks, but with more familiar weapons – knives, revolvers, knuckle-dusters, rifles with and without bayonets, metal bars and spades. He also perfected responses to various combat combinations – one with a long spade, the other with a short one; one with a spade, the other with a gun; one with a metal bar, the other with a piece of rope; one with an axe, three unarmed; and so forth.

As a result of its rapid development the new style of combat won the right to independent existence and its own name – sambo – which is an abbreviation of the Russian for 'self-defence without weapons' (*samooborona bez oruzhiya*). The reader should not be misled by the word 'defence'. In the Soviet Union the word 'defence' has always been understood in a rather special way. *Pravda* formulated the idea succinctly before the Second World War: 'The best form of defence is rapid attack until the enemy is completely destroyed.'[1]

Today sambo is one of the compulsory features in the training of every *spetsnaz* fighting man. It is one of the most popular spectator sports in the Soviet Army. It is not only in the Army, of course, that they engage in sambo, but the Soviet Army always comes out on top. Take, for example, the championship for the prize awarded by the magazine *Sovetsky Voin* in 1985. This is a very important championship in which sportsmen from many different clubs compete. But as early as the quarter finals, of the eight men left in the contest one was from the *Dinamo* club (an MVD lieutenant), one from the mysterious *Zenit* club, and the rest were from ZSKA, the Soviet Army club.

The words 'without weapons' in the name sambo should not mislead the reader. Sambo permits the use of any objects that can be used in a fight, up to revolvers and sub-machine-guns. It may be said that a hammer is not a weapon, and that is true if the hammer is in the hands of an inexperienced person. But in the hands of a

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[1] *Pravda*, 14 August 1939.

master it becomes a terrible weapon. An even more frightful weapon is a spade in the hands of a skilled fighter. It was with the Soviet Army spade that we began this book. Ways of using it are one of the dramatic elements of sambo. A *spetsnaz* soldier can kill people with a spade at a distance of several metres as easily, freely and silently as with a P–6 gun.

There are two sides to sambo: sporting sambo and battle sambo. Sambo as a sport is just two men without weapons, restricted by set rules. Battle sambo is what we have described above. There is plenty of evidence that many of the holds in battle sambo are not so much secret as of limited application. Only in special teaching institutions, like the *Dinamo* Army and *Zenit* clubs, are these holds taught. They are needed only by those directly involved in actions connected with the defence and consolidation of the regime.

■ ■ ■

The *spetsnaz* naval brigades are much better equipped technically than those operating on land, for good reasons. A fleet always had and always will have much more horsepower per man than an army. A man can move over the earth simply using his muscles, but he will not get far swimming in the sea with his muscles alone. Consequently, even at the level of the ordinary fighting man there is a difference in the equipment of naval units and ground forces. An ordinary rank and file swimmer in the *spetsnaz* may be issued with a relatively small apparatus enabling him to swim under the water at a speed of up to 15 kilometres an hour for several hours at a time. Apart from such individual sets there is also apparatus for two or three men, built on the pattern of an ordinary torpedo. The swimmers sit on it as if on horseback. And in addition to this light underwater apparatus, extensive use is made of midget submarines.

The Soviet Union began intensive research into the development of midget submarines in the middle of the 1930s. As usual, the same task was presented to several groups of designers at the same time, and there was keen competition between them. In 1936 a government commission studied four submissions: the Moskito, the Blokha, and the APSS and Pigmei. All four could be transported by small freighters or naval vessels. At that time the Soviet Union had completed development work on its K-class

submarines, and there was a plan that each K-class submarine should be able to carry one light aircraft or one midget submarine. At the same time experiments were also being carried out for the purpose of assessing the possibility of transporting another design of midget submarine (similar to the APSS) in a heavy bomber.

In 1939 the Soviet Union put into production the M–400 midget submarine designed by the designer of the 'Flea' prototype. The M–400 was a mixture of a submarine and a torpedo boat. It could stay for a long time under water, then surface and attack an enemy at very high speed like a fast torpedo boat. The intention was also to use it in another way, closing in on the enemy at great speed like a torpedo boat, then submerging and attacking at close quarters like an ordinary submarine.

Among the trophies of war were the Germans' own midget submarines and plans for the future, all of which were very widely used by Soviet designers. Interest in German projects has not declined. In 1976 there were reports concerning a project for a German submarine of only 90 tons displacement. Soviet military intelligence then started a hunt for the plans of this vessel and for information about the people who had designed them.

It should never be thought that interest in foreign weapons is dictated by the Soviet Union's technical backwardness. The Soviet Union has many talented designers who have often performed genuine technical miracles. It is simply that the West always uses its own technical ideas, while Soviet engineers use their own and other people's. In the Soviet Union in recent years remarkable types of weapons have been developed, including midget submarines with crews of from one to five men. The *spetsnaz* naval brigades have several dozen midget submarines, which may not seem to be very many, but it is more than all other countries have between them. Side by side with the usual projects intensive work is being done on the creation of hybrid equipment which will combine the qualities of a submarine and an underwater tractor. The transportation of midget submarines is carried out by submarines of larger displacement, fighting ships and also ships from the fishing fleet. In the 1960s in the Caspian Sea the trials took place of a heavy glider for transporting a midget submarine. The result of the trial is not known. If such a glider has been built then in the event of war we can expect to see midget submarines appear in the most unexpected places, for example in the Persian Gulf, which is

so vital to the West, even *before* the arrival of Soviet troops and the Navy. In the 1970s the Soviet Union was developing a hydroplane which, after landing on water, could be submerged several metres below water. I do not know the results of this work.

■ ■ ■

Naval *spetsnaz* can be very dangerous. Even in peacetime it is much more active than the *spetsnaz* brigades in the land forces. This is understandable, because *spetsnaz* in the land forces can operate only in the territory of the Soviet Union and its satellites and in Afghanistan, while the naval brigades have an enormous field of operations in the international waters of the world's oceans and sometimes in the territorial waters of sovereign states.

In the conduct of military operations the midget submarine can be a very unpleasant weapon for the enemy. It is capable of penetrating into places in which the ordinary ship cannot operate. The construction of several midget submarines may be cheaper than the construction of one medium-sized submarine, while the detection of several midget submarines and their destruction can be a very much more difficult task for an enemy than the hunt for the destruction of one medium-sized submarine.

The midget submarine is a sort of mobile base for divers. The submarine and the divers become a single weapons system which can be used with success against both seaborne and land targets.

The *spetsnaz* seaborne brigades can in a number of cases be an irreplaceable weapon for the Soviet high command. Firstly, they can be used for clearing the way for a whole Soviet fleet, destroying or putting out of action minefields and acoustic and other detection systems of the enemy. Secondly, they can be used against powerful shore-based enemy defences. Some countries – Sweden and Norway for example – have built excellent coastal shelters for their ships. In those shelters the ships are in no danger from many kinds of Soviet weapon, including some nuclear ones. To discover and put out of action such shelters will be one of *spetsnaz*'s most important tasks. Seaborne *spetsnaz* can also be used against bridges, docks, ports and underwater tunnels of the enemy. Even more dangerous may be *spetsnaz* operations against the most expensive and valuable ships – the aircraft carriers, cruisers, nuclear submarines, floating bases for submarines, ships

carrying missiles and nuclear warheads, and against command ships.

In the course of a war many communications satellites will be destroyed and radio links will be broken off through the explosion of nuclear weapons in outer space. In that case an enormous number of messages will have to be transmitted by underground and underwater cable. These cables are a very tempting target for *spetsnaz*. *Spetsnaz* can either destroy or make use of the enemy's underwater cables, passively (i.e. listening in on them) or actively (breaking into the cable and transmitting false messages). In order to be able to do this during a war the naval brigades of *spetsnaz* are busy in peacetime seeking out underwater cables in international waters in many parts of the world.

■ ■ ■

The presence of Soviet midget submarines has been recorded in recent years in the Baltic, Black, Mediterranean, Tyrrhenian and Caribbean seas. They have been operating in the Atlantic not far from Gibraltar. It is interesting to note that for this 'scientific' work the Soviet Navy used not only the manned submarines of the Argus class but also the automatic unmanned submarines of the Zvuk class.

Unmanned submarines are the weapon of the future, although they are already in use in *spetsnaz* units today. An unmanned submarine can be of very small dimensions, because modern technology makes it possible to reduce considerably the size and weight of the necessary electronic equipment. Equally, an unmanned submarine does not need a supply of air and can have any number of bulkheads for greater stability and can raise its internal pressure to any level, so that it can operate at any depths. Finally, the loss of such a vessel does not affect people's morale, and therefore greater risks can be taken with it in peace and war. It can penetrate into places where the captain of an ordinary ship would never dare to go. Even the capture of such a submarine by an enemy does not involve such major political consequences as would the seizure of a Soviet manned submarine in the territorial waters of another state. At present, Soviet unmanned automatic submarines and other underwater equipment operate in conjunction with manned surface ships and submarines. It is quite possible that for the foreseeable future these tactics will be continued,

because there has to be a man somewhere nearby. Even so, the unmanned automatic submarines make it possible substantially to increase the *spetsnaz* potential. It is perfectly easy for a Soviet ship with a crew to remain innocently in international waters while an unmanned submarine under its control is penetrating into an enemy's territorial waters.

■ ■ ■

Apart from manned and unmanned submarines *spetsnaz* has for some decades now been paying enormous attention to 'live submarines' – dolphins. The Soviet Union has an enormous scientific centre on the Black Sea for studying the behaviour of dolphins. Much of the centre's work is wrapped in the thick shroud of official secrecy.

From ancient times the dolphin has delighted man by its quite extraordinary abilities. A dolphin can easily dive to a depth of 300 metres; its hearing range is seventy times that of a human being; its brain is surprisingly well developed and similar to the human brain. Dolphins are very easy to tame and train.

The use of dolphins by *spetsnaz* could widen their operations even further, using them to accompany swimmers in action and warning them of danger; guarding units from an enemy's underwater commandos; hunting for all kinds of objects under water – enemy submarines, mines, underwater cables and pipelines; and the dolphin could be used to carry out independent acts of terrorism: attacking important targets with an explosive charge attached to it, or destroying enemy personnel with the aid of knives, needles or more complicated weapons attached to its body.

Chapter 10
Battle Training

It was a cold, grey day, with a gusty wind blowing and ragged clouds sweeping across the sky. The deputy chief of the *spetsnaz* department, 17th Army, and I were standing near an old railway bridge. Many years previously they had built a railway line there, but for some reason it had been abandoned half-built. There remained only the bridge across leaden-coloured water. It seemed enormously high up. Around us was a vast emptiness, forest covering enormous spaces, where you were more likely to meet a bear than a man.

A *spetsnaz* competition was in progress. The lieutenant-colonel and I were umpires. The route being covered by the competitors was many tens of kilometres long. Soldiers, sodden with the rain and red in the face, laden with weapons and equipment, were trying to cover the route in the course of a few days – running, quick-marching, running again. Their faces were covered with a dirty growth of beard. They carried no food and got their water from the streams and lakes. In addition there were many unpleasant and unforeseen obstacles for them on the way.

At our control point, orange arrows told the soldiers to cross the bridge. In the middle of the bridge another arrow pointed to the handrail at the edge. A soldier lagging a long way behind his group ran onto the bridge. His tiredness kept his head down, so he ran to the middle of the bridge, and then a little further before he came to a sharp halt. He turned back and saw the arrow pointing to the

edge. He looked over the rail and saw the next arrow on a marshy island, some way away and overgrown with reeds. It was huge and orange, but only just visible in the distance. The soldier let out a whistle of concern. He clambered onto the rail with all his weapons and equipment, let out a violent curse and jumped. As he dropped, he also tried to curse his fate and *spetsnaz* in good soldier's language, but the cry turned into a long drawn-out howl. He hit the black freezing water with a crash and for a long time did not reappear. Finally his head emerged from the water. It was late autumn and the water was icy cold. But the soldier set off swimming for the distant island.

At our control point, where one after the other the soldiers plunged from the high bridge, there was no means of rescuing any soldier who got into difficulty. And there was no one to rescue anybody either. We officers were there only to observe the men, to make sure each one jumped, and from the very middle of the bridge. The rest did not concern us.

'What if one of them drowns?' I asked the *spetsnaz* officer.

'If he drowns it means he's no good for *spetsnaz*.'

■ ■ ■

It means he's no good for *spetsnaz*. The sentence expresses the whole philosophy of battle training. The old soldiers pass it on to the young ones who take it as a joke. But they very soon find out that nobody is joking.

Battle training programmes for *spetsnaz* are drawn up in consultation with some of the Soviet Union's leading experts in psychology. They have established that in the past training had been carried out incorrectly, on the principle of moving from the simple to the more difficult. A soldier was first taught to jump from a low level, to pack his parachute, to land properly, and so forth, with the prospect later of learning to make a real parachute jump. But the longer the process of the initial training was drawn out, the longer the soldier was made to wait, the more he began to fear making the jump. Experience acquired in previous wars also shows that reservists, who were trained for only a few days and then thrown into battle, in the majority of cases performed very well. They were sometimes short of training, but they always had enough courage. The reverse was also shown to be true. In the First World War the best Russian regiments stayed in Saint

Petersburg. They protected the Emperor and they were trained only to be used in the most critical situations. The longer the war went on, the less inclined the guards regiments became to fight. The war dragged on, turned into a senseless carve-up, and finally the possibility arose of a quick end to it. To bring the end nearer the Emperor decided to make use of his guards. . . .

The Revolution of 1917 was no revolution. It was simply a revolt by the guards in just one city in a huge empire. The soldiers no longer wanted to fight; they were afraid of war and did not want to die for nothing. Throughout the country there were numerous parties all of which were in favour of ending the war, and only one of them called for peace. The soldiers put their trust in that party. Meanwhile, the regiments that were fighting at the front had suffered enormous losses and their morale was very low, but they had not thought of dispersing to their homes. The front collapsed only when the central authority in Saint Petersburg collapsed.

Lenin's party, which seized power in that vast empire by means of the bayonets of terrified guards in the rear, drew the correct conclusions. Today soldiers are not kept for long in the rear and they don't spend much time in training. It is judged much wiser to throw the young soldier straight into battle, to put those who remain alive into the reserve, reinforce with fresh reservists, and into battle again. The title of 'guards' is then granted only in the course of battle, and only to those units that have suffered heavy losses but kept fighting.

Having absorbed these lessons, the commanders have introduced other reforms into the methods of battle training. These new principles were tried out first of all on *spetsnaz* and gave good results.

The most important feature of the training of a young *spetsnaz* soldier is not to give him time to reflect about what is ahead of him. He should come up against danger and terror and unpleasantness unexpectedly and not have time to be scared. When he overcomes this obstacle, he will be proud of himself, of his own daring, determination and ability to take risks. And subsequently he will not be afraid.

Unpleasant surprises are always awaiting the *spetsnaz* soldier in the first stage of his service, sometimes in the most unlikely situations. He enters a classroom door and they throw a snake

round his neck. He is roused in the morning and leaps out of bed to find, suddenly, an enormous grey rat in his boot. On a Saturday evening, when it seems that a hard week is behind him, he is grabbed and thrown into a small prison cell with a snarling dog. The first parachute jump is also dealt with unexpectedly. A quite short course of instruction, then into the sky and straight away out of the hatch. What if he smashes himself up? The answer, as usual: he is no good for *spetsnaz*!

Later the soldier receives his full training, both theoretical and practical, including ways to deal with a snake round his neck or a rat in his boot. But by then the soldier goes to his training classes without any fear of what is to come, because the most frightful things are already behind him.

■ ■ ■

One of the most important aspects of full battle training is the technique of survival. In the Soviet Union there are plenty of places where there are no people for thousands of square kilometres. Thus the method is to drop a small group of three or four men by parachute in a completely unfamiliar place where there are no people, no roads and nothing except blinding snow from one horizon to the other or burning sand as far as the eye can see. The group has neither a map nor a compass. Each man has a Kalashnikov automatic, but only one round of ammunition. In addition he has a knife and a spade. The food supply is the minimum, sometimes none at all. The group does not know how long it will have to walk – a day, five days, a fortnight? The men can use their ammunition as they please. They can kill a deer, an elk or a bear. That would be plenty for the whole group for a long journey. But what if wolves were to attack and the ammunition were finished?

To make the survival exercises more realistic the groups take no radio sets with them, and they cannot transmit distress signals, whatever has happened within the group, until they meet the first people on their way. Often they begin with a parachute drop in the most unpleasant places: on thin ice, in a forest, in mountains. In 1982 three Soviet military parachutists made a jump into the crater of the Avachinsk volcano. First of all they had to get themselves out of the crater. Two other Soviet military parachutists have several times begun their exercises with a landing on the summit of

Mount Elbruz (5,642 metres). Having successfully completed the survival route they have done the same thing on the highest mountains in the Soviet Union – the peaks named after Lenin (7,134 metres) and Communism (7,495 metres).

In the conditions prevailing in Western Europe today different habits and different training methods are necessary. For this part of their training *spetsnaz* soldiers are dressed in black prison jackets and dropped off at night in the centre of a big city. At the same time the local radio and television stations report that a group of especially dangerous criminals have escaped from the local prison. Interestingly, it is forbidden to publish such reports in the press in the Soviet Union but they may be put out by the local radio and television. The population thus gets only small crumbs of information, so that they are scared stiff of criminals about whom all sorts of fantastic stories start circulating.

The 'criminals' are under orders to return to their company. The local police and MVD troops are given the job of finding them. Only the senior officers of the MVD know that it is only an exercise. The middle and lower ranks of the MVD operate as if it were the real thing. The senior officers usually tell their subordinates that the 'criminals' are not armed and they are to report immediately one of them is arrested. There is a problem, though: the police often do not trust the report that the criminal is not armed (he may have stolen a gun at the last moment) and so, contrary to their instructions, they use their guns. Sometimes the arrested soldier may be delivered back to his superior officers in a half-dead state – he resisted, they say, and we simply had to defend ourselves.

In some cases major exercises are carried out, and then the whole of the police and the MVD troops know that it is just an exercise. Even so, it is a risky business to be in a *spetsnaz* group. The MVD use dogs on exercises, and the dogs do not understand the difference between an exercise and real fighting.

■ ■ ■

The *spetsnaz* soldier operates on the territory of the enemy. One of his main tasks is, as we have seen, to seek out specially important targets, for which purpose he has to capture people and extract the necessary information from them by force. That the soldier knows how to extract the information we have no doubt. But how can he

understand what his prisoner is saying? *Spetsnaz* officers go through special language training and in addition every *spetsnaz* company has an officer-interpreter who speaks at least two foreign languages fluently. But there is not always an officer to hand in a small group, so every soldier and sergeant questioning a prisoner must have some knowledge of a foreign language. But most *spetsnaz* soldiers serve for only two years and their battle training is so intense that it just is not possible to fit in even a few extra hours.

How is this problem solved? Can a *spetsnaz* soldier understand a prisoner who nods his head under torture and indicates his readiness to talk?

The ordinary *spetsnaz* soldier has a command of fifteen foreign languages and can use them freely. This is how he does it.

Imagine that you have been taken prisoner by a *spetsnaz* group. Your companion has had a hot iron on the palms of his hands and a big nail driven into his head as a demonstration. They look at you questioningly. You nod your head – you agree to talk. Every *spetsnaz* soldier has a silken phrasebook – a white silk handkerchief on which there are sixteen rows of different questions and answers. The first sentence in Russian is: 'Keep your mouth shut or I'll kill you.' The sergeant points to this sentence. Next to it is a translation into English, German, French and many other languages. You find the answer you need in your own language and nod your head. Very good. You understand each other. They can free your mouth. The next sentence is: 'If you don't tell the truth you'll be sorry!' You quickly find the equivalent in your own language. All right, all clear. Further down the silk scarf are about a hundred simple sentences, each with translations into fifteen languages – 'Where?', 'Missile', 'Headquarters', 'Airfield', 'Store', 'Police checkpoint', 'Minefield', 'How is it guarded?', 'Platoon?', 'Company?', 'Battalion?', 'Dogs?', 'Yes', 'No', and so forth. The last sentence is a repetition of the second: 'If you don't tell the truth you'll be sorry!'

It takes only a couple of minutes to teach the stupidest soldier to communicate with the aid of the silken phrasebook. In addition the soldier is taught to say and understand the simplest and most necessary words, like 'forward', 'back', 'there', 'here', 'to the right', 'to the left', 'metres', 'kilometres' and the numbers from one to twenty. If a soldier is not able to learn this no harm is done, because it is all written on the silk scarf, of which there is one for every man in the group.

In the early 1970s Soviet scientists started to develop a very light electronic device for translating in place of the silken phrasebook or to supplement it. The high command's requirements were simple: the device had to weigh not more than 400 grams, had to fit into a satchel and to be the size of a small book or even smaller. It had to have a display on which could appear a word or simple phrase in Russian which would immediately be translated into one of the most widely used languages. The person being questioned would print out his answer which would immediately be translated into Russian. I do not know whether such a device is now in use. But progress in technology will soon permit the creation of something similar. Not only *spetsnaz* but many other organisations in the Soviet Army have displayed interest in the device. However, no device can replace a real interpreter, and that is why, along with the real interpreters, so many people of different foreign nationalities are to be found in *spetsnaz*.

A Soviet soldier who escaped from Afghanistan told how he had been put into a reconnaissance company from an air-assault brigade. This is a case of not-quite *spetsnaz*. Somebody found out that he spoke one of the local dialects and he was immediately sent to the commanding officer. The officer asked him two questions, the traditional two:

'Do you drink vodka? What about sport?'

'Vodka, yes, sport no.'

He gave completely the wrong answers. But in battle conditions a man speaking the language of the enemy is particularly valued. They take him on in spite of everything, and take very good care of him, because on his ability to speak and understand what is said may depend the life of the group or of many groups. And on the way the groups carry out their mission may depend the lives of thousands and in some cases millions of people. The one drawback to being an interpreter is that interpreters are never forgiven for making a mistake. But the drawback is the same for him as it is for everyone else in the unit.

■ ■ ■

No soldier should be afraid of fire. Throughout the Soviet Army, in every branch of the forces, very close attention is paid to a soldier's or sailor's psychological readiness to come up against

fire. In the Navy old submarines are grounded, and several sailors are shut in a compartment in which a fire is started. In the tank forces men are shut into an old tank and a fire is lit inside or outside and sometimes both at once.

The *spetsnaz* soldier comes up against fire more often than any other soldier. For that reason it is constantly present in his battle training from the first to the last day. At least once a day he sees fire that is clearly threatening his life. He is forced to jump over wide ditches with fires raging in them. He has to race through burning rooms and across burning bridges. He rides a motorcycle between flaming walls. Fire can break out next to him at any moment – when he is eating or sleeping. When he is making a parachute jump to test the accuracy of his fall a tremendous flame may flare up suddenly beneath him.

The *spetsnaz* soldier is taught to deal with fire and to protect himself and his comrades by every means – rolling along the ground to stop his clothes burning, smothering the flames with earth, branches or a groundsheet. In learning to deal with fire the most important thing is not so much for him to get to know ways of protecting himself (though this is important) as to make him realise that fire is a constant companion of life which is always at his side.

Another very important element of *spetsnaz* training is to teach a soldier not to be afraid of blood and to be able to kill. This is more important and more difficult for *spetsnaz* than for the infantry, for example. The infantry man kills his enemy mainly at a distance of more than a hundred metres and often at a distance of 300 or 400 metres or more. The infantryman does not see the expression on the face of his enemy. His job is simply to take aim correctly, hold his breath and press the trigger smoothly. The infantryman fires at plywood targets in peacetime, and in wartime at people who look at a distance very much like plywood targets. The blood which an infantryman sees is mainly the blood of his dead comrade or his own, and it gives rise to anger and a thirst for revenge. After that the infantryman fires at his enemy without feeling any twinges of conscience.

The training of a *spetsnaz* soldier is much more complicated. He often has to kill the enemy at close quarters, looking him straight in the face. He sees blood, but it is not the blood of his comrades; it is often the blood of a completely innocent man. The officers

commanding *spetsnaz* have to be sure that every *spetsnaz* soldier will do his duty in a critical situation.

Like fire, blood is a constant attribute of the battle training of a soldier. It used to be thought that a soldier could be accustomed to the sight of blood gradually – first a little blood and then more day by day. But experts have thrown out this view. The *spetsnaz* soldier's first encounter with blood should be, they argue, quite unexpected and in copious quantities. In the course of his career as a fighting man there will be a whole lot of monstrous things which will spring up in front of him without any warning at all. So he should get used to being unsurprised at anything and afraid of nothing.

A group of young *spetsnaz* soldiers are hauled out of bed at night because of an emergency, and sent in pursuit of a 'spy'. The worse the weather the better. Best of all when there is torrential rain, a gusty wind, mud and slush. Many kilometres of obstacles – broken-down stairs, holes in walls, ropes across holes and ditches. The platoon of young soldiers are completely out of breath, their hearts beating fast. Their feet slip, their hands are scratched and bruised. Forward! Everyone is bad-tempered – the officers and especially the men. The soldier can give vent to his anger only by punching some weaker fellow-sufferer in the face and maybe getting a kick in the ribs in reply. The area is dotted with ruined houses, everything is smashed, ripped apart, and there's broken glass everywhere. Everything is wet and slippery, and there are never-ending obstacles with searchlights trained on them. But they don't help: they only hinder, blinding the men as they scramble over. Now they come to a dark cellar, with the doors ripped off the hinges. Everybody down. Along the corridor. Then there's water ahead. The whole group running at full tilt without slowing down rushes straight into some sticky liquid. A blinding light flashes on. It's not water they are in – it's blood. Blood up to the knees, the waist, the chest. On the walls and the ceiling are chunks of rotten flesh, piles of bleeding entrails. The steps are slippery from slimy bits of brain. Undecided, the young soldiers jam the corridor. Then somebody in the darkness lets a huge dog off its chain. There is only one way out – through the blood. Only forwards, where there is a wide passageway and a staircase upwards.

Where on earth could they get so much blood? From the

slaughter-house, of course. It is not so difficult to make the tank of blood. It can be narrow and not very deep, but it must be twisting and there must be a very low ceiling over it. The building in which the tank of blood is arranged can be quite small, but piles of rotten boards, beams and concrete slabs must be tipped into it. Even in very limited space it is possible to create the impression that you are in an endless labyrinth overflowing with blood. The most important thing is to have plenty of twists and turns, holes, gaps, dead ends and doors. If you don't have enough blood you can simply use animal entrails mixed with blood. The bottom of the tank must not be even: you must give the learner the possibility of tripping over and going under. But most important is that the first training session should take place with a group of really young soldiers who have joined *spetsnaz* but are still isolated and have had no opportunity of meeting older soldiers and being warned what to expect. And there's something else: the tank of blood must not be the final obstacle that night. The greatest mistake is to drive the men through the tank and then bring the exercise to an end, leaving them to clean themselves up and go to bed. In that case the blood will only appear to them as a terrible dream. Keep driving them on over more and more obstacles.

Exhausting training exercises must be repeated and repeated again, never stopping to rest. Carry on with the exercise throughout the morning, throughout the day. Without food and without drink. In that way the men acquire the habit of not being taken aback by any surprises. Blood on their hands and on their uniforms, blood in their boots – it all becomes something familiar. On the same day there must also be a lot of gunfire, labyrinths with bones, and dogs, dogs and more dogs. The tank of blood must be remembered by the men as something quite ordinary in a whole series of painful experiences.

In the next training session there is no need to use a lot of blood, but it must be constantly present. The men have to crawl beneath some barbed wire. Why not throw some sheep's innards on to the ground and the wire? Let them crawl over that and not just along the ground. A soldier is firing from his sub-machine-gun on the firing range. Why not surround his firing position with chunks of rotting meat which is in any case no good for eating? A soldier makes a parachute jump to test the accuracy of his drop. Why not put on his landing spot, face down, a big puppet in *spetsnaz*

uniform with a torn, twisted parachute spattered with pig's blood? These are all standard tricks in *spetsnaz*, simple and effective. To increase the effect the instructors are constantly creating situations in which the men are obliged to get blood on their hands. For example, a soldier has to overcome an obstacle by scrambling up a wall. When he reaches up to grab the ridge at the top of the wall he finds it slippery and sticky from blood. He has a choice – either to drop down and break his legs (and maybe his neck) or to hang on tighter with both hands, rest his chin on the filthy sill, shift his grip, pull himself up and jump in through the window. A *spetsnaz* soldier does not fall. He pulls himself up and, with blood all over him, swearing hoarsely, he carries on his way, onwards, ever onwards.

Later in the programme come half-joking exercises such as: catch a pregnant cat, open its belly with a razor blade and count how many kittens it has. This is not such an easy exercise as might appear at first. The soldier has no gloves, the cat scratches and he has no one to help him. As an instrument he is allowed to use only a blunt, broken razor blade or razor, and he can easily cut his own fingers.

The process of familiarising *spetsnaz* men with the sight and the reality of blood is not in the least intended to make them into sadists. It is simply that blood is a liquid with which they are going to have to work in wartime. A *spetsnaz* soldier may not be scared of the red liquid. A surgeon works continually with blood and so does the butcher. What would happen if a surgeon or a butcher were suddenly to be afraid of the sight of blood?

■ ■ ■

Every Soviet soldier, wherever he may be serving, must be able to run, to shoot accurately, to keep his weapon clean and in good working order, and carry out the orders of his superiors precisely and quickly and without asking unnecessary questions. If one studies the battle training of Soviet troops one notices that there are common standards for all branches of troops operating in any conditions. This gives the impression that training in the Soviet Army is the same whatever the conditions. This is not quite true. Many of the demands placed on officers and men are standard throughout the Army. Nevertheless, each Soviet military district and each group of forces operates in conditions unique to itself.

Troops of the Leningrad military district have to operate in very severe northern conditions, and their training takes place in forests, marshes and the *tundra* of an arctic climate. Troops of the Transcaucasian military district have to operate in high mountains, while those of the Carpathian and Ural military districts have to operate in medium-high mountains. Even so, the Carpathian district has a mild European climate, while that of the Ural district is wildly different: harsh, with a very hot summer and a very cold winter.

Every military district and group of forces has a commanding officer, a chief of staff and a head of Intelligence who answer with their heads for the battle-readiness of the troops under their command. But every district and group faces a specific enemy, and its own particular (though absolutely secret) task to perform in the event of war, and its own individual role in the plans of the General Staff.

One reason that training takes place *in situ* is that every Soviet frontier district and group of forces has, as a rule, the same natural conditions as the territories in which it will have to fight. Conditions in Karelia differ very little from those in Norway, Sweden and Finland. If troops from the Carpathian military district cross the frontier, they find themselves in a country of high rugged mountains identical to that in which they are permanently stationed. And, if the Soviet troops in Germany cross the frontier, even if there are small differences of terrain and climate, they are at any rate still in Germany.

Spetsnaz is concentrated at this level of fronts and armies. To make sure that *spetsnaz* training is carried out in conditions as close as possible to those in which the troops will have to operate the *spetsnaz* brigades now have special training centres. For example, the natural conditions in the Baltic military district are very similar to those in Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, northern Germany and France. The mountainous Altai is strikingly similar to Scotland. In the Carpathians there are places very similar to the French Alps. If troops have to be trained for operations in Alaska and Canada, Siberia is ideal for the purpose, while for operating in Australia *spetsnaz* units have to be trained in Kazakhstan. The *spetsnaz* brigades have their own training centres, but a brigade (or any other *spetsnaz* unit) can be ordered at any moment to operate in an unfamiliar training centre belonging to another brigade. For

example, during the 'Dvina' manoeuvres *spetsnaz* units from the Leningrad, Moscow and North Caucasus military districts were transferred to Belorussia to operate there in unfamiliar conditions. The difference in conditions was especially great for the units transferred from the northern Caucasus.

These transfers are restricted mainly to troops of the internal military districts. It is reckoned that troops which are already located in Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Transcaucasian military districts will remain there in any circumstances, and it is better to train them thoroughly for operations in those conditions without wasting effort on training for every kind of condition. 'Universal' training is needed by the troops of the internal districts – the Siberian, Ural, Volga, Moscow and a few others which in the event of war will be switched to crisis points. Courses are also provided for the professional athletes. Every one of these is continually taking part in contests and travelling round the whole country from Vladivostok to Tashkent and Tbilisi to Archangelsk. Such trips in themselves play a tremendous part in training. The professional athlete becomes psychologically prepared to operate in any climate and any circumstances. Trips abroad, especially trips to those countries in which he will have to operate in the event of war, are of even greater assistance in removing psychological barriers and making the athlete ready for action in any conditions.

■ ■ ■

Spetsnaz units are often involved in manoeuvres at different levels and with different kinds of participants. Their principal 'enemies' on manoeuvres are the MVD troops, the militia, the frontier troops of the KGB, the government communications network of the KGB and the ordinary units of the armed forces.

In time of war KGB and MVD troops would be expected to operate against national liberation movements within the Soviet Union, of which the most dangerous is perceived to be the Russian movement against the USSR. (In the last war it was the Russians who created the most powerful anti-Communist army – the ROA). The Ukrainian resistance movement is also considered to be very dangerous. Partisan operations would inevitably break out in the Baltic states and the Caucasus, among others. KGB and MVD troops, which are not controlled by the Ministry of Defence, are equipped with helicopters, naval vessels, tanks, artillery and

armoured personnel carriers, and exercises in which they operate against *spetsnaz* are of exceptional value to them. But the heads of the GRU are keen on joint manoeuvres for their own reasons. If *spetsnaz* has years' experience of operating against such powerful opponents as the KGB and MVD, its performance against less powerful opponents can only be enhanced.

In the course of manoeuvres the KGB and the MVD (along with the Soviet military units which have to defend themselves) use against *spetsnaz* the whole gamut of possible means of defence, from total control of radio-communication to electronic sensors, from hunter aircraft provided with the latest equipment to sniffer dogs, which are used in enormous numbers.

Apart from operating against real Soviet military targets, *spetsnaz* units go through courses at training centres where the conditions and atmosphere of the areas in which they will be expected to fight are reproduced with great fidelity. Models of Pluto, Pershing and Lance missiles and of Mirage–VI, Jaguar and other nuclear-armed aircraft are used to indicate the 'enemy'. There is also artillery capable of firing nuclear shells, special kinds of vehicles used for transporting missiles, warheads, and so forth.

The *spetsnaz* groups have to overcome many lines of defences, and any group that is caught by the defenders is subject to treatment that is rough enough to knock out of the men any desire to get caught in the future, either on manoeuvres or in a real battle. The *spetsnaz* soldier constantly has the thought drilled into him that being a prisoner is worse than death. At the same time he is taught that his aims are noble ones. First he is captured on manoeuvres and severely beaten, then he is shown archive film shot in concentration camps in the Second World War (the films are naturally more frightful than what can be perpetrated on manoeuvres), then he is released, but may be seized again and subjected to a repeat performance. It is calculated that, in a fairly short time, the soldier will develop a very strong negative reaction to the idea of being a prisoner, and the certainty that death – a noble death, in the cause of *spetsnaz* – is preferable.

■ ■ ■

One one occasion following my flight to the West I was present at some large-scale military manoeuvres in which the armies of many Western countries took part. The standard of battle training made

a very favourable impression on me. I was particularly impressed by the skilful, I would even say masterly, way the units camouflaged themselves. The battle equipment, the tanks and other vehicles, and the armoured personnel carriers are painted with something that does not reflect the sunlight; the colour is very cleverly chosen; and the camouflaging is painted in such a way that it is difficult to make out the vehicle even at a short distance and its outline mixes in with the background. But every army made one enormous mistake with the camouflaging of some of the vehicles, which had huge white circles and red crosses painted on their sides. I explained to the Western officers that the red and white colours were very easily seen at a distance, and that it would be better to use green paint. I was told that the vehicles with the red cross were intended for transporting the wounded, which I knew perfectly well. That was a good reason, I said, why the crosses should be painted out or made very much smaller. Please be human, I said. You are transporting a wounded man and you must protect him by every means. Then protect him. Hide him. Make sure the Communists can't see him.

The argument continued and I did not win the day. Later, other Western officers tried to explain to me that I was simply ignorant of the international agreement about these things. You are not allowed to fire on a vehicle with a red cross. I agreed that I was ignorant and knew nothing about these agreements. But like me, the Soviet soldier is also unaware of those agreements. Those big red crosses are painted so that the Soviet soldier can see them and not fire on them. But the Soviet soldier only knows that a red cross means something medical. Nobody has ever told him he was not to shoot at a red cross.

I learnt about this strange rule, that red crosses must not be shot at, quite by chance. When I was still a Soviet officer, I was reading a book about Nazi war criminals and amongst the charges made was the assertion that the Nazis had sometimes fired on cars and trains bearing a red cross. I found this very interesting, because I could not understand why such an act was considered a crime. A war was being fought and one side was trying to destroy the other. In what way did trains and cars with red crosses differ from the enemy's other vehicles?

I found the answer to the question quite independently, but not in the Soviet regulations. Perhaps there is an answer to the

question there, but, having served in the Soviet Army for many years and having sat for dozens of examinations at different levels, I have never once come across any reference to the rule that a soldier may not fire at a red cross. At manoeuvres I often asked my commanding officers, some of them very high-ranking, in a very provocative way what would happen if an enemy vehicle suddenly appeared with a red cross on it. I was always answered in a tone of bewilderment. A Soviet officer of very high rank who had graduated from a couple of academies could not understand *what* difference it made if there were a red cross. Soviet officers have never been told its complete significance. I never bothered to put the question to any of my subordinates.

I graduated from the Military-Diplomatic Academy, and did not perform badly there. In the course of my studies I listened attentively to all the lectures and was always waiting for someone among my teachers (many of them with general's braid and many years' experience in international affairs) to say something about the red cross. But I learnt only that the International Red Cross organisation is located in Geneva, directly opposite the Permanent Representation of the USSR in United Nations agencies, and that the organisation, like any other international organisation, can be used by officers of the Soviet Intelligence services as a cover for their activities.

For whose benefit do the armies of the West paint those huge red crosses on their ambulances? Try painting a red cross on your back and chest, and going into the forest in winter. Do you think the red cross will save you from being attacked by wolves? Of course not. The wolves do not know your laws and do not understand your symbols. So why do you use a symbol the meaning of which the enemy has no idea?

In the last war the Communists did not respect international conventions and treaties, but some of their enemies, with many centuries of culture and excellent traditions, failed equally to respect international laws. Since then the Red Army has used the red cross symbol, painted very small, as a sign to tell its own soldiers where the hospital is. The red cross needs only to be visible to their own men. The Red Army has no faith in the goodwill of the enemy.

International treaties and conventions have never saved anybody from being attacked. The Ribbentrop-Molotov pact is a

striking example. It did not protect the Soviet Union. But if Hitler had managed to invade the British Isles the pact would not have protected Germany either. Stalin said quite openly on this point: 'War can turn all agreements of any kind upside down.'[1]

The Soviet leadership and the Soviet diplomatic service adopt a philosophical attitude to all agreements. If one trusts a friend there is no need for a treaty; friends do not need to rely on treaties to call for assistance. If one is weaker than one's enemy a treaty will not be any use anyway. And if one is stronger than one's enemy, what is the point of observing a treaty? International treaties are just an instrument of politics and propaganda. The Soviet leadership and the Soviet Army put no trust in any treaties, believing only in the force that is behind the treaties.

Thus the enormous red cross on the side of a military vehicle is just a symbol of Western naïveté and faith in the force of protocols, paragraphs, signatures and seals. Since Western diplomats have signed these treaties they ought to insist that the Soviet Union, having also signed them, should explain to its soldiers, officers and generals what they contain, and should include in its official regulations special paragraphs forbidding certain acts in war. Only then would there be any sense in painting on the huge red crosses.

The red cross is only one example. One needs constantly to keep in mind what Lenin always emphasised: that a dictatorship relies on force and not on the law. 'The scientific concept of dictatorship means power, limited in no way, by no laws and restrained by absolutely no rules, and relying directly on force.'[2]

Spetsnaz is one of the weapons of a dictatorship. Its battle training is imbued with just one idea: to destroy the enemy. It is an ambition which is not subject to any diplomatic, juridical, ethical or moral restraints.

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[1] *Pravda*, 15 September 1927.
[2] Lenin, Vol. 25, p. 441.

Chapter 11
Behind Enemy Lines: *Spetsnaz* Tactics

Before *spetsnaz* units can begin active operations behind the enemy's lines they have to get there. The Soviet high command has the choice of either sending *spetsnaz* troops behind the enemy's lines before the outbreak of war, or sending them there after war has broken out. In the first case the enemy may discover them, realise that war has already begun and possibly press the buttons to start a nuclear war – pre-empting the Soviet Union. But if *spetsnaz* troops are sent in after the outbreak of war, it may be too late. The enemy may already have activated its nuclear capability, and then there will be nothing to put out of action in the enemy's rear: the missiles will be on their way to Soviet territory. One potential solution to the dilemma is that the better, smaller part of *spetsnaz* –the professional athletes – arrives before all-out war starts, taking extreme measures not to be discovered, while the standard units penetrate behind enemy lines after war has started.

■ ■ ■

In every Soviet embassy there are two secret organisations – the KGB *rezidentura* and the GRU *rezidentura*. The embassy and the KGB *rezidentura* are guarded by officers of the KGB frontier troops, but in cases where the GRU *rezidentura* has a complement of more than ten officers, it has its own internal *spetsnaz* guard.

Before the outbreak of a war, in some cases several months previously, the number of *spetsnaz* officers in a Soviet embassy may be substantially increased, to the point where practically all the auxiliary personnel in the embassy, performing the duties of guards, cleaners, radio-operators, cooks and mechanics, will be *spetsnaz* athletes. With them, as their 'wives', women athletes from *spetsnaz* may turn up in the embassy. Similar changes of staff may take place in the many other Soviet bodies – the consulate, the commercial representation, the offices of Aeroflot, Intourist, TASS, Novosti and so forth.

The advantages of this arrangement are obvious, but it is not without its dangers. The principal danger lies in the fact that these new terrorist groups are based right in the centre of the country's capital city, uncomfortably close to government offices and surveillance. But within days, possibly within hours, before the outbreak of war they can, with care, make contact with the *spetsnaz* agent network and start a real war in the very centre of the city, using hiding places already prepared.

Part of their support will come from other *spetsnaz* groups which have recently arrived in the country in the guise of tourists, teams of sportsmen and various delegations. And at the very last moment large groups of fighting men may suddenly appear out of Aeroflot planes, ships in port, trains and Soviet long-distance road transport ('Sovtransavto'). Simultaneously there may be a secret landing of *spetsnaz* troops from Soviet submarines and surface vessels, both naval and merchant. (Small fishing vessels make an excellent means of transport for *spetsnaz*. They naturally spend long periods in the coastal waters of foreign states and do not arouse suspicion, so *spetsnaz* groups can spend a long time aboard and can easily return home if they do not get an order to make a landing). At the critical moment, on receipt of a signal, they can make a landing on the coast using aqualungs and small boats. *Spetsnaz* groups arriving by Aeroflot can adopt much the same tactics. In a period of tension, a system of regular watches may be introduced. This means that among the passengers on every plane there will be a group of commandos. Having arrived at their intended airport and not having been given a signal, they can remain aboard the aircraft[1] and

[1]An aircraft is considered to be part of the territory of the country to which it belongs, and the pilot's cabin and the interior of the plane are not subject to foreign supervision.

go back on the next flight. Next day another group will make the trip, and so on. One day the signal will come, and the group will leave the plane and start fighting right in the country's main airport. Their main task is to capture the airport for the benefit of a fresh wave of *spetsnaz* troops or airborne units (VDV).

It is a well-known fact that the 'liberation' of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 began with the arrival at Prague airport of Soviet military transport planes with VDV troops on board. The airborne troops did not need parachutes; the planes simply landed at the airport. Before the troops disembarked there was a moment when both the aircraft and their passengers were completely defenceless. Was the Soviet high command not taking a risk? No, because the fact is that by the time the planes landed, Prague airport had already been largely paralysed by a group of 'tourists' who had arrived earlier.

Spetsnaz groups may turn up in the territory of an enemy from the territory of neutral states. Before the outbreak of war or during a war *spetsnaz* groups may penetrate secretly into the territory of neutral states and wait there for an agreed signal or until a previously agreed time. One of the advantages of this is that the enemy does not watch over his frontiers with neutral countries as carefully as he does over his frontiers with Communist countries. The arrival of a *spetsnaz* group from a neutral state may pass unnoticed both by the enemy and the neutral state.

But what happens if the group is discovered on neutral territory? The answer is simple: the group will go into action in the same way as in enemy territory – avoid being followed, kill any witnesses, use force and cunning to halt any pursuers. They will make every effort to ensure that nobody from the group gets into the hands of their pursuers and not to leave any evidence about to show that the group belongs to the armed forces of the USSR. If the group should be captured by the authorities of the neutral state, Soviet diplomacy has enormous experience and some well-tried countermoves. It may admit its mistake, make an official apology and offer compensation for any damage caused; it may declare that the group lost its way and thought it was already in enemy territory; or it may accuse the neutral state of having deliberately seized a group of members of the Soviet armed forces on Soviet territory for provocative purposes, and demand explanations, apologies and compensation, accompanied by open threats.

Experience has shown that this last plan is the most reliable. The reader should not dismiss it lightly. Soviet official publications wrote at the beginning of December 1939 that war was being waged against Finland in order to establish a Communist regime there, and a Communist government of 'people's Finland' had already been formed. Thirty years later Soviet marshals were writing that it was not at all like that: the Soviet Union was simply acting in self-defence. The war against Finland, which was waged from the first to the last day on Finnish territory, is now described as 'repelling Finnish aggression'[1] and even as 'fulfilling the plan for protecting our frontiers.'[2]

The Soviet Union is always innocent: it only repels perfidious aggressors. On other people's territory.

■ ■ ■

The principal way of delivering the main body of *spetsnaz* to the enemy's rear after the outbreak of war is to drop them by parachute. In the course of his two years' service every *spetsnaz* soldier makes thirty-five to forty parachute jumps. *Spetsnaz* professionals and officers have much greater experience with parachutes; some have thousands of jumps to their credit.

The parachute is not just a weapon and a form of transport. It also acts as a filter which courageous soldiers will pass through, but weak and cowardly men will not. The Soviet Government spends enormous sums on the development of parachute jumping as a sport. This is the main base from which the airborne troops and *spetsnaz* are built up. On 1 January 1985 the FAI had recorded sixty-three world records in parachute jumping, of which forty-eight are held by Soviet sportsmen (which means the Soviet Army). The Soviet military athlete Yuri Baranov was the first man in the world to exceed 13,000 jumps. Among Soviet women the champion in the number of jumps is Aleksandra Shvachko – she has made 8,200 jumps. The parachute psychosis continues.

■ ■ ■

In peacetime military transport planes are used for making parachute drops. But this is done largely to prevent the fact of the

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[1]Marshal K. A. Meretskov, *Na Sluzhbe na rodu* (*In the Service of the People*), 1968.
[2]Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, *Delo Vsei gesnie* (*A Life's Work*), 1968.

existence of *spetsnaz* from spreading. In wartime military transports would be used for dropping *spetsnaz* groups only in exceptional circumstances. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, the whole fleet of military transport planes would be taken up with transporting the airborne forces (VDV), of which there are an enormous number. Apart from which, military aviation would have other difficult missions to perform, such as the transport of troops within the country from passive, less important sectors to the areas where the main fighting was taking place. Secondly, the majority of military transports are enormous aircraft, built for moving people and equipment on a large scale, which do not suit the purposes of *spetsnaz*. It needs small planes that do not present large targets and carry no more than twenty or thirty people. They must also be able to fly at very low level without much noise. In some cases even smaller aircraft that take eight to ten, or down to three or four parachutists, are needed.

However, the official term 'civil aviation', which is the source of most *spetsnaz* transport in wartime, is a substantial misnomer. The minister for civil aviation bears, quite officially, the rank of air chief marshal in the Air Force. His deputies bear the rank of generals. The whole of Aeroflot's flying personnel have the ranks of officers of the reserve. In the event of war Aeroflot simply merges with the Soviet Air Force, and the reserve officers then become regular officers with the same rank.

It has more than enough small aircraft for the business of transporting and supplying *spetsnaz* units. The best of them are the Yakovlev–42 and the Yakovlev–40, very manoeuvrable, reliable, low-noise planes capable of flying at very low altitudes. They have one very important construction feature – passengers embark and disembark through a hatch at the bottom and rear of the aircraft. If need be, the hatch cover can be removed altogether, giving the parachutists an exit as on a military transport plane, which makes it possible to drop them in complete safety. Another plane that has great possibilities for *spetsnaz* is the Antonov–72 – an exact copy of the American YC–14 of which the plans were stolen by GRU spies.

But how can *spetsnaz* parachutists use ordinary civil jet-propelled aircraft, which passengers enter and leave by side doors? The doors cannot be opened in flight. And if they were made to open inwards instead of outwards, it would be exceptionally dangerous for a parachutist to leave the plane, because the force of

the current of air would press the man back against the body of the plane. He might be killed either from the force with which he bounced back against the plane, or through interference with the opening of his parachute.

The problem has been solved by a very simple device. The door is arranged to open inwards, and a wide tube made of strong, flexible, synthetic material is allowed to hang out. As he leaves the door the parachutist finds himself in a sort of three-metre long corridor which he slides down so that he comes away from the aircraft when he is slightly to one side and below the fuselage.

Variations on this device were first used on Ilyushin–76 military transport planes. The heavy equipment of the airborne troops was dropped out of the huge rear freight hatch, while at the same time the men were leaving the plane through flexible 'sleeves' at the side. The West has not given this simple but very clever invention its due. Its importance lies not only in the fact that the time taken to drop Soviet parachutists from transport planes has been substantially reduced, with the result that every drop is safer and that forces are much better concentrated on landing. What it also means is that practically *any* jet-propelled civil aircraft can now be used for dropping parachute troops.

■ ■ ■

The dropping of a *spetsnaz* unit can be carried out at any time of the day or night. Every time has its advantages and its problems. Night-time is the *spetsnaz* soldier's ally, when the appearance of a group of *spetsnaz* deep in the enemy's rear may not be noticed at all. Even if the enemy were aware of the group's arrival, it is never easy to organise a full-scale search at night, especially if the exact landing place is not known and may be somewhere inaccessible where there are forests and hills or mountains with few roads and no troops on the spot. But at night there are likely to be casualties among the parachutists as they land. The same problems of assembly and orientation which face the pursuit troops face the *spetsnaz* unit too.

During the day, obviously, there are fewer accidents on landing; but the landing will be seen. Deliberate daytime landings may sometimes be carried out for the simple reason that the enemy does not expect such brazen behaviour at such a time.

In many cases the drop will be carried out early in the morning

while there are still stars in the sky and the sun has not risen. This is a very good time if large numbers of soldiers are being dropped who are expected to go straight into battle and carry out their mission by means of a really sudden attack. In that case the high command does its best to ensure that the groups have as much daylight as possible for active operations on the first, most important day of their mission.

But every *spetsnaz* soldier's favourite time for being dropped is at sunset. The flight is calculated so that the parachutists' drop is carried out in the last minutes before the onset of darkness. The landing then takes place in the twilight when it is still light enough to avoid landing on a church spire or a telegraph pole. In half an hour at the most darkness will conceal the men and they will have the whole night ahead of them to leave the landing area and cover their tracks.

■ ■ ■

On its own territory *spetsnaz* has a standard military structure:[1] section, platoon, company, battalion, brigade; or section, platoon, company, regiment. This organisation simplifies the control, administration and battle training of *spetsnaz*. But this structure cannot be used on enemy territory.

The problem is, firstly, that every *spetsnaz* operation is individual and unlike any other; a plan is worked out for each operation, which is unlike any other. Each operation consequently requires forces organised, not in a standard fashion, but adapted to the particular plan.

Secondly, when it is on enemy territory, a *spetsnaz* unit is in direct communication with a major headquarters, at the very least the headquarters of an all-arm or tank army, and orders are received in many cases directly from a high-level HQ. A very long chain of command is simply not needed.

On operations a simple and flexible chain of command is used. The organisational unit on enemy territory is known officially as the reconnaissance group of *spetsnaz* (RGSN). A group is formed before the beginning of an operation and may contain from two to thirty men. It can operate independently or as part of a detachment (ROSN), which consists of between thirty and 300 or more men.

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[1]See Appendices for precise organisation of *spetsnaz* at different levels.

The detachment contains groups of various sizes and for various purposes. The names 'detachment' and 'group' are used deliberately, to emphasise the temporary nature of the units. In the course of an operation groups can leave a detachment and join it again, and each group may in turn break up into several smaller groups or, conversely, come together with others into one big group. Several large groups can join up and form a detachment which can at any moment split up again. The whole process is usually planned before the operation begins. For example: the drop may take place in small groups, perhaps fifteen of them altogether. On the second day of the operation (D+1) eight of the groups will join up into one detachment for a joint raid, while the rest operate independently. On D+2 two groups are taken out of the detachment to form the basis of a new detachment and another six groups link up with the second detachment. On D+5 the first detachment splits up into groups and on D+6 the second group splits up, and so on. Before the beginning of the operation each group is informed where and when to meet up with the other groups and what to do in case the rendezvous is not kept.

■ ■ ■

Having landed in enemy territory *spetsnaz* may go straight into battle. Otherwise, it will hide the equipment it no longer needs – boats, parachutes, etc – by either burying them in the ground or sinking them in water. Very often it will then mine the drop area. The mines are laid where the unwanted equipment has been buried. The area is also treated with one of a number of substances which will confuse a dog's sense of smell. After that, the group (of whatever size) will break up into little sub-groups which depart quickly in different directions. A meeting of the sub-groups will take place later at a previously arranged spot or, if this proves problematic, at one of the several alternative places which have been agreed.

The drop area is usually the first place where casualties occur. However good the parachute training is, leg injuries and fractures are a frequent occurrence, and when the drop takes place in an unfamiliar place, in complete darkness, perhaps in fog, over a forest or mountains, they are inevitable. Even built-up areas provide their own hazards. *Spetsnaz* laws are simple and easy to understand. In a case of serious injury the commander cannot take the wounded man

with him; doing so would greatly reduce the group's mobility and might lead to the mission having to be aborted. But the commander cannot, equally, leave the wounded man alone. Consequently a simple and logical decision is taken, to kill the wounded man. *Spetsnaz* has a very humane means of killing its wounded soldiers – a powerful drug known to the men as 'Blessed Death'. An injection with the drug stops the pain and quickly produces a state of blissful drowsiness. In the event that a commander decides, out of misguided humanity, to take the wounded man with him, and it looks as if this might jeopardise the mission, the deputy commander is under orders to dispatch both the wounded man and the commander. The commander is removed without recourse to drugs. It is recommended that he be seized from behind with a hand over his mouth and a knife blow to his throat. If the deputy does not deal with his commander in this situation, then not just the commander and his deputy, but the entire group may be regarded as traitors, with all the inevitable consequences.

As they leave the area of the drop the groups and sub-groups cover their tracks, using methods that have been well known for centuries: walking through water and over stones, walking in each other's footsteps, and so forth. The groups lay more mines behind them and spread more powder against dogs.

After leaving the drop zone and having made sure that they are not being followed, the commander gives orders for the organisation of a base and a reserve base, safe places concealed from the view of outsiders. Long before a war GRU officers, working abroad in the guise of diplomats, journalists, consuls and other representatives of the USSR, choose places suitable for establishing bases. The majority of GRU officers have been at some time very closely familiar with *spetsnaz*, or are themselves *spetsnaz* officers, or have worked in the Intelligence Directorate of a district or group of forces. They know what is needed for a base to be convenient and safe.

Bases can be of all sorts and kinds. The ideal base would be a hiding place beneath ground level, with a drainage system, running water, a supply of food, a radio set to pick up the local news and some simple means of transport. I have already described how *spetsnaz* agents, recruited locally, can establish the more elaborate bases which are used by the professional groups of athletes carrying out exceptionally important tasks. In the majority of cases

the base will be somewhere like a cave, or an abandoned quarry, or an underground passage in a town, or just a secluded place among the undergrowth in a dense forest.

A *spetsnaz* group can leave at the base all the heavy equipment it does not need immediately. The existence of even the most rudimentary base enables it to operate without having to carry much with it in the way of equipment or supplies. The approaches to the base are always guarded and the access paths mined – the closest with ordinary mines and the more distant ones with warning mines which explode with much noise and a bright flash, alerting any people in the base of approaching danger.

When the group moves off to carry out its task, a few men normally remain behind to guard the base, choosing convenient observation points from which to keep an eye on it. In the event of its being discovered the guard leaves the location quietly and makes for the reserve base, leaving warnings of the danger to the rest of the group in an agreed place. The main group returning from its mission will visit the reserve base first and only then go to the main base. There is a double safeguard here: the group may meet the guards in the reserve base and so avoid falling into a trap; otherwise the group will see the warning signals left by the guards. The craters from exploded mines around the base may also serve as warnings of danger. If the worst comes to the worst, the guards can give warning of danger by radio.

A *spetsnaz* group may also have a moving base. Then it can operate at night, unhampered by heavy burdens, while the guards cart all the group's heavy equipment along by other routes. Each morning the group meets up with its mobile base. The group replenishes its supplies and then remains behind to rest or to set off on another operation, while the base moves to another place. The most unexpected places can be used by the mobile bases. I once saw a base which looked simply like a pile of grass that had been thrown down in the middle of a field. The soldiers' packs and equipment had been very carefully disguised, and the men guarding the base were a kilometre away, also in a field and camouflaged with grass. All around there were lots of convenient ravines overgrown with young trees and bushes. That was where the KGB and MVD units were looking for the *spetsnaz* base, and where the helicopters were circling overhead. It did not occur to anybody that a base could be right in the middle of an open field.

In some cases a *spetsnaz* group may capture a vehicle for transporting its mobile base. It might be an armoured personnel carrier, a truck or an ordinary car. And if a group is engaged in very intensive fighting involving frequent changes of location, then no base is organised. In the event of its being pursued the group can abandon all its heavy equipment, having first removed the safety pin from the remaining mines.

■ ■ ■

In order to destroy a target it has first to be located. In the overwhelming majority of cases a *spetsnaz* operation includes the search for the target. This is understandable, since targets whose location is known and which are not movable can be destroyed easily and quickly with missiles and aircraft. But a great number of targets in present-day fighting are mobile. On the eve of a war or just after it has broken out, government offices are moved out of a country's capital for secret command posts whose location is known to very few people. New communications centres and lines are brought into operation. Aircraft are removed from stationary aerodromes and dispersed to airfields established in places unknown to the enemy. Many missile installations are moved to new concealed, and carefully guarded, locations. Troops and headquarters are also relocated.

In these circumstances the search for targets acquires paramount significance for *spetsnaz*. To be able to find a target of special importance, to identify it, and to know how to distinguish real targets from false ones, become the most important tasks for *spetsnaz*, more important even than the destruction of the targets. Once a target has been discovered it can be destroyed by other forces – missiles, aircraft, marines, airborne troops. But a target that has not been discovered cannot be destroyed by anyone.

Because the business of identifying targets is the most important task for *spetsnaz* it cannot be a separate and independent organisation. It can carry out this task only if it relies on all the resources of the GRU, and only if it can make use of information obtained by agents and from all the various kinds of *razvedka* – satellite, aircraft, naval, electronic, and so forth.

Every form of *razvedka* has its good and its bad side. A complete picture of what is happening can be obtained only by making use of all forms of *razvedka* in close interaction one with another,

compensating for the weaknesses of some forms with the advantages of the others.

Every officer in charge of *razvedka* uses *spetsnaz* only where its use can give the very best result. When he sends a *spetsnaz* group behind enemy lines the officer in command already knows a good deal about the enemy from other sources. He knows exactly what the unit is to look for and roughly where it has to look. The information obtained by *spetsnaz* groups (sometimes only fragmentary and uncertain) can in turn be of exceptional value to the other forms of *razvedka* and be the starting point for more attentive work in those areas by agents and other services.

Only with a union of all forces and resources is it possible to reveal the plans and intentions of the enemy, the strength and organisation of his forces, and to inflict defeat on him.

But let us return to the commander of the *spetsnaz* group who, despatching it to a particular area, already knows a good deal about the area, the specially important targets that may be found there, and even their approximate location. This information (or as much of it as concerns him) is passed on to the commander of the group and his deputy. The group has landed safely, covered its tracks, established a base and started its search. How should it set about it?

There are several tried and tested methods. Each target of special importance must have a communications centre and lines of communication leading to it. The group may include experts at radio *razvedka*. Let us not forget that *spetsnaz* is the 3rd department and radio *razvedka* the 5th department of the same Directorate (the Second) at the headquarters of every front, fleet, group of forces and military district. *Spetsnaz* and radio *razvedka* are very closely connected and often help each other, even to the point of having radio *razvedka* experts in *spetsnaz* groups. By monitoring radio transmissions in the area of important targets it is possible to determine quite accurately their whereabouts.

But it is also possible to discover the target without the aid of radio *razvedka*. The direction of receiving and transmitting aerials of tropospheric, radio-relay and other communication lines provides a lot of information about the location of the terminal points on lines of communication. This in turn leads us right up to the command posts and other targets of great importance.

Sometimes before a search begins the commander of the group

will decide by the map which, in his opinion, are the most likely locations for particular targets. His group will examine those areas first of all.

If the targets are moved, then the roads, bridges, tunnels and mountain passes where they may be seen are put under observation.

The search for a particular target can be carried out simultaneously by several groups. In that case the officer in charge divides the territory being searched into squares in each of which one group operates.

Each group searching a square usually spreads out into a long line with tens or even hundreds of metres between each man. Each man moves by the compass, trying to keep in sight of his neighbours. They advance in complete silence. They choose suitable observation points and carefully examine the areas ahead of them, and if they discover nothing they move on to another hiding place. In this way relatively small groups of well-trained soldiers can keep quite extensive areas under observation. Unlike *razvedka* conducted from outer space or the air, *spetsnaz* can get right up to targets and view them, not from above, but from the ground. Experience shows that it is much more difficult to deceive a *spetsnaz* man with false targets than it is a man operating an electronic intelligence station or an expert at interpreting pictures taken from the air or from space.

Spetsnaz groups have recently begun to make ever greater use of electronic apparatus for seeking their targets. They now carry portable radar, infra-red and acoustic equipment, night-vision sights, and so forth. But whatever new electronic devices are invented, they will never replace the simplest and most reliable method of establishing the location of important targets: questioning a prisoner.

It may be claimed that not every prisoner will agree to answer the questions put to him, or that some prisoners will answer the questions put by *spetsnaz* but give wrong answers and lead their interrogators astray. To which my reply is categorical. *Everybody* answers questions from *spetsnaz*. There are no exceptions. I have been asked how long a very strong person can hold out against questioning by *spetsnaz*, without replying to questions. The answer is: one second. If you don't believe this, just try the following experiment. Get one of your friends who considers

himself a strong character to write on a piece of paper a number known only to himself and seal the paper in an envelope. Then tie your friend to a post or a tree and ask him what number he wrote on the paper. If he refuses to answer, file his teeth down with a big file and count the time. Having received the answer, open the envelope and check that he has given you the number written on the paper. I guarantee the answer will be correct.

If you perform such an experiment, you will have an idea of one of *spetsnaz*'s milder ways of questioning people. But there are more effective and reliable ways of making a person talk. Everyone who falls into the hands of *spetsnaz* knows he is going to be killed. But people exert themselves to give correct and precise answers. They are not fighting for their lives but for an easy death. Prisoners are generally interrogated in twos or larger groups. If one seems to know less than the others, he can be used for demonstration purposes to encourage them to talk. If the questioning is being done in a town the prisoner may have a heated iron placed on his body, or have his ears pierced with an electric drill, or be cut to pieces with an electric saw. A man's fingers are particularly sensitive. If the finger of a man being questioned is simply bent back and the end of the finger squashed as it is bent, the pain is unendurable. One method considered very effective is a form of torture known as 'the bicycle'. A man is bound and laid on his back. Pieces of paper (or cotton wool or rags) soaked in spirit, eau-de-cologne, etc., are stuck between his fingers and set alight.

Spetsnaz has a special passion for the sexual organs. If the conditions permit, a very old and simple method is used to demonstrate the power of *spetsnaz*. The captors drive a big wedge into the trunk of a tree, then force the victim's sexual organs into the opening and knock out the wedge. They then proceed to question the other prisoners. At the same time, in order to make them more talkative, the principal *spetsnaz* weapon – the little infantryman's spade – is used. As *spetsnaz* asks its questions the blade of the spade is used to cut off ears and fingers, to hit the victims in the liver and perform a whole catalogue of unpleasant operations on the person under interrogation.

One very simple way of making a man talk is known as the 'swallow', well known in Soviet concentration camps. It does not require any weapons or other instruments, and if it is used with discretion it does not leave any traces on the victim's body. He is

laid face down on the ground and his legs are bent back to bring his heels as close as possible to the back of his neck. The 'swallow' generally produces a straight answer in a matter of seconds.

Of course, every method has its shortcomings. That is why a commander uses several methods at the same time. The 'swallow' is not usually employed in the early stages of an operation. Immediately after a landing, the commander of a *spetsnaz* group tries to use one really blood-thirsty device out of his arsenal: cutting a man's lips with a razor, or breaking his neck by twisting his head round. These methods are used even when a prisoner obviously has no information, the aim being to prevent any possibility of any of the men in the group going over to the enemy. Everyone, including those who have not taken part in the torture, knows that after this he has no choice: he is bound to his group by a bloody understanding and must either come out on top or die with his group. In case of surrender he may have to suffer the same torture as his friends have just used.

In recent years the KGB, GRU and *spetsnaz* have had the benefit of an enormous training ground in which to try out the effectiveness of their methods of questioning: Afghanistan. The information received from there describes things which greatly exceed in skill and inventiveness anything I have described here. I am quite deliberately not quoting here interrogation methods used by the Soviet forces, including *spetsnaz*, in Afghanistan, which have been reported by thoroughly reliable sources. Western journalists have access to that material and to living witnesses.

Once it has obtained the information it needs about the targets of interest to it, the *spetsnaz* group checks the facts and then kills the prisoners. It should be particularly noted that those who have told the truth do have an easy death. They may be shot, hanged, have their throats cut or be drowned. *Spetsnaz* does not torture anybody for the sake of torture. You come across practically no sadists in *spetsnaz*. If they find one they quickly get rid of him. Both the easier and the tougher forms of questioning in *spetsnaz* are an unavoidable evil that the fighting men have to accept. They use these methods, not out of a love of torturing people, but as the simplest and most reliable way of obtaining information essential to their purpose.

■ ■ ■

Having discovered the target and reported on it to their command, *spetsnaz* will in most cases leave the target area as quickly as possible. Very soon afterwards, the target will come under attack by missiles, aircraft or other weapons. In a number of cases, however, the *spetsnaz* group will destroy the target it has discovered itself. They are often given the mission in that form: 'Find and destroy'. But there are also situations when the task is given as 'Find and report', and the group commander takes an independent decision about destroying the target. He may do so when, having found the target, he discovers suddenly that he cannot report to his superior officers about it; and he may also do so when he comes across a missile ready for firing.

Robbed of the chance or the time to transmit a report, the commander has to take all possible steps to destroy the target, including ordering a suicide attack on it. Readiness to carry out a suicide mission is maintained in *spetsnaz* by many methods. One of them is to expose obvious sadists and have them transferred immediately to other branches of the forces, because experience shows that in the overwhelming majority of cases the sadist is a coward, incapable of sacrificing himself.

The actual destruction of targets is perhaps the most ordinary and prosaic part of the entire operation. VIPs are usually killed as they are being transported from one place to another, when they are at their most vulnerable. The weapons include snipers' rifles, grenade-launchers or mines laid in the roadway. If a VIP enjoys travelling by helicopter it is a very simple matter. For one thing, a single helicopter is a better target than a number of cars, when the terrorists do not know exactly which car their victim is travelling in. Secondly, even minor damage to a helicopter will bring it down and almost certainly kill the VIP.

Missiles and aircraft are also attacked with snipers' rifles and grenade-launchers of various kinds. One bullet hole in a missile or an aircraft can put it out of action. If he cannot hit his target from a distance the commander of the group will attack, usually from two sides. His deputy will attack with one group of men from one side, trying to make as much noise and gunfire as possible, while the other group led by the commander will move, noiselessly, as close to the target as it can. It is obvious that an attack by a small *spetsnaz* group on a well defended target is suicide. But *spetsnaz* will do it. The fact is that even an

unsuccessful attack on a missile ready for firing will force the enemy to re-check the whole missile and all its supporting equipment for faults. This may delay the firing for valuable hours, which in a nuclear war might be long enough to alter the course of the conflict.

Chapter 12
Control and Combined Operations

If we describe the modern infantryman in battle and leave it at that, then, however accurate the description, the picture will be incomplete. The modern infantryman should never just be described independently, because he never operates independently. He operates in the closest co-operation with tanks; his way forward is laid by sappers; the artillery and air force work in his interests; he may be helped in his fighting by helicopter gunships; ahead of him there are reconnaissance and parachute units; and behind him is an enormous organisation to support and service him, from supplying ammunition to evacuating the wounded quickly.

To understand the strength of *spetsnaz* one has to remember that *spetsnaz* is primarily reconnaissance, forces which gather and transmit information to their commanders to which their commanders immediately react. The strength of those reconnaissance forces lies in the fact that they have behind them the whole of the nuclear might of the USSR. It may be that before the appearance of *spetsnaz* on enemy territory, a nuclear blow will already have been made, and despite the attendant dangers, this greatly improves the position of the fighting groups, because the enemy is clearly not going to bother with them. In other circumstances the groups will appear on enemy territory and obtain information required by the Soviet command or amplify it, enabling an immediate nuclear

strike to follow. A nuclear strike close to where a *spetsnaz* group is operating is theoretically regarded as the salvation of the group. When there are ruins and fires all round, a state of panic and the usual links and standards have broken down, a group can operate almost openly without any fear of capture.

Similarly, Soviet command may choose to deploy other weapons before *spetsnaz* begins operations or immediately after a group makes its landing: chemical weapons, air attacks or bombardment of the coastline with naval artillery. There is a co-operative principle at work here. Such actions will give the *spetsnaz* groups enormous moral and physical support. And the reverse is also true – the operations of a group in a particular area and the information it provides will make the strike by Soviet forces more accurate and effective.

In the course of a war direct co-operation is the most dependable form of co-operation. For example, the military commander of a front has learnt through his network of agents (the second department of the 2nd Directorate at front headquarters) or from other sources that there is in a certain area a very important but mobile target which keeps changing its position. He appoints one of his air force divisions to destroy the target. A *spetsnaz* group (or groups) is appointed to direct the division to the target. The liaison between the groups and the air force division is better not conducted through the front headquarters, but directly. The air division commander is told very briefly what the groups are capable of, and they are then handed over to his command. They are dropped behind enemy lines and, while they are carrying out the operation, they maintain direct contact with their divisional headquarters. After the strike on the target the *spetsnaz* group – if it has survived – returns immediately to the direct control of the front headquarters, to remain there until it needs to be put under the command of some other force as decided by the front commander.

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Direct co-operation is a cornerstone of Soviet strategy and practised widely on manoeuvres, especially at the strategic level,[1] when *spetsnaz* groups from regiments of professional athletes are

[1]See Appendix D for the organisation of *spetsnaz* at strategic level.

subordinated to commanders of, for example, the strategic missile troops or the strategic (long-range) aviation.

For the main principle governing Soviet strategy is the concentration of colossal forces against the enemy's most vulnerable spot. Soviet troops will strike a super-powerful, sudden blow and then force their way rapidly ahead. In this situation, or immediately before it, a mass drop of *spetsnaz* units will be carried out ahead of and on the flanks of the advancing force, or in places that have to be neutralised for the success of the operation on the main line of advance.

Spetsnaz units at army level,[1] on the other hand, are dropped in the areas of operations of their own armies at a depth of 100 to 500 kilometres; and *spetsnaz* units under the command of the fronts[2] are dropped in the area of operations of their fronts at a depth of between 500 and 1000 kilometres.

The headquarters to which the group is subordinated tries not to interfere in the operations of the *spetsnaz* group, reckoning that the commander on the spot can see and understand the situation better than can people at headquarters far from where the events are taking place. The headquarters will intervene if it becomes necessary to redirect it to attack a more important target or if a strike is to take place where it is located. But a warning may *not* be given if the group is not going to have time to get away from the strike area, since all such warnings carry the risk of revealing Soviet intentions to the enemy.

Co-operation between different groups of *spetsnaz* is carried out by means of a distribution of territories for operations by different groups, so that simultaneous blows can be struck in different areas if need be. Co-operation can also be carried out by forward headquarters at battalion, regiment and brigade level, dropped behind the lines to co-ordinate major *spetsnaz* forces in an area. Because *spetsnaz* organisation is so flexible, a group which has landed by chance in another group's operational area can quickly be brought under the latter's command by an order from a superior headquarters.

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In the course of a war other Soviet units apart from *spetsnaz* will be operating in enemy territory:

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[1]See Appendix A. [2]See Appendix B.

Deep reconnaissance companies from the reconnaissance battalions of the motor-rifle and tank divisions. Both in their function and the tactics they adopt, these companies are practically indistinguishable from regular *spetsnaz*. The difference lies in the fact that these companies do not use parachutes but penetrate behind the enemy's lines in helicopters, jeeps and armoured reconnaissance vehicles. Deep reconnaissance units do not usually co-operate with *spetsnaz*. But their operations, up to 100 kilometres behind the front line, make it possible to concentrate *spetsnaz* activity deeper in the enemy's rear without having to divert it to operations in the zone nearer the front.

Air-assault brigades at front level operate independently, but in some cases *spetsnaz* units may direct the combat helicopters to their targets. It is sometimes possible to have joint operations conducted by men dropped from helicopters and to use helicopters from an air-assault brigade for evacuating the wounded and prisoners.

Airborne divisions operate in accordance with the plans of the commander-in-chief. If difficulties arise with the delivery of supplies to their units, they switch to partisan combat tactics. Co-operation between airborne divisions and *spetsnaz* units is not normally organised, although large-scale drops in the enemy's rear create a favourable situation for operations by all *spetsnaz* units.

Naval infantry are commanded by the same commander as naval *spetsnaz*: every fleet commander has one brigade of the latter and a brigade (or regiment) of infantry. Consequently these two formations, both intended for operations in the enemy's rear, co-operate very closely. Normally when the naval infantry makes a landing on an enemy coastline, their operation is preceded by, or accompanied by, *spetsnaz* operations in the same area. Groups of naval *spetsnaz* can, of course, operate independently of the naval infantry if they need to, especially in cases where the operations are expected to be in remote areas requiring special skills of survival or concealment.

There are two specific sets of circumstances in which superior headquarters organises direct co-operation between all units operating in the enemy rear. The first is when a combined attack offers the only possibility of destroying or capturing the target, and

the second is when Soviet units in the enemy rear have suffered substantial losses and the Soviet command decides to make up improvised groups out of the remnants of the ragged units that are left.

■ ■ ■

In the course of an advance *spetsnaz* groups, as might be expected, co-operate very closely with the forward detachments.

A Soviet advance – a sudden break through the defences of the enemy in several places and the rapid forward movement of masses of troops, supported by an equal mass of aircraft and helicopters – is always co-ordinated with a simultaneous strike in the rear of the enemy by *spetsnaz* forces, airborne troops and naval infantry.

In other armies different criteria are applied to measure a commander's success – for example, what percentage of the enemy's forces have been destroyed by his troops. In the Soviet Army this is of secondary importance, and may be of no importance at all, because a commander's value is judged by one criterion only: the speed with which his troops advance.

To take the speed of advance as the sole measure of a commander's abilities is not so stupid as it might seem at first glance. As a guiding principle it forces all commanders to seek, find and exploit the weakest spots in the enemy's defences. It obliges the commander to turn the enemy's flank and to avoid getting caught up in unnecessary skirmishes. It also makes commanders make use of theoretically impassable areas to get to the rear of the enemy, instead of battering at his defences.

To find the enemy's weak spots a commander will send reconnaissance groups ahead, and forward detachments which he has assembled for the duration of the advance. Every commander of a regiment, division, army and, in some cases, of a front will form his own forward detachment. In a regiment the detachment normally includes a motor-rifle company with a tank platoon (or a tank company with a motor-rifle platoon); a battery of self-propelled howitzers; an anti-aircraft platoon; and an anti-tank platoon and sapper and chemical warfare units. In a division it will consist of a motor-rifle or tank battalion, with a tank or motor-rifle company as appropriate; an artillery battalion; anti-aircraft and anti-tank batteries; and a company of sappers and some support units. In an army the scale is correspondingly greater: two or three

motor-rifle battalions; one or two tank battalions; two or three artillery battalions, a battalion of multi-barrelled rocket launchers; a few anti-aircraft batteries; an anti-tank battalion; and sappers and chemical warfare troops. Where a front makes up its own forward detachment it will consist of several regiments, most of them tank regiments. The success of each general (i.e. the speed at which he advances) is determined by the speed of his very best units. In practice this means that it is determined by the operations of the forward detachment which he sends into battle. Thus every general assembles his best units for that crucial detachment, puts his most determined officers in command, and puts at their disposal a large slice of his reinforcements. All this makes the forward detachment into a concentration of the strength of the main forces.

It often happens that very high-ranking generals are put in command of relatively small detachments. For example, the forward detachment of the 3rd Guards Tank Army in the Prague operation was commanded by General I. G. Ziberov, who was deputy chief of staff. (The detachment consisted of the 69th mechanised brigade, the 16th self-propelled artillery brigade, the 50th motorcycle regiment, and the 253rd independent penal company).

Every forward detachment is certainly very vulnerable. Let us imagine what the first day of a war in Europe would be like, when the main concentration of Soviet troops has succeeded in some places in making very small breaches in the defences of the forces of the Western powers. Taking advantage of these breaches, and of any other opportunities offered – blunders by the enemy, unoccupied sectors and the like – about a hundred forward detachments of regiments, about twenty-five more powerful forward detachments of divisions, and about eight even more powerful forward detachments from armies have penetrated into the rear of the NATO forces. None of them has got involved in the fighting. They are not in the least concerned about their rear or their flanks. They are simply racing ahead without looking back.

This is very similar to the Vistula-Oder operation of 1945, on the eve of which Marshal G. K. Zhukov assembled all sixty-seven commanders of the forward detachments and demanded of each one: 100 kilometres forward progress on the first day of the operation. A hundred kilometres, irrespective of how the main

forces were operating, and irrespective of whether the main forces succeeded in breaking through the enemy's defences. Every commander who advanced a hundred kilometres on the first day or averaged seventy kilometres a day for the first four days would receive the highest award – the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union. Everybody in the detachment would receive a decoration, and all the men undergoing punishment (every forward detachment has on its strength anything from a company to a battalion's worth of such men riding on the outside of the tanks) would have their offences struck out.

Say what you like about the lack of initiative in Soviet soldiers and officers. Just imagine giving men from a penal battalion such a task. If you succeed in not getting involved in the fighting, and if you manage to outflank the enemy and keep moving, we will strike out all your offences. Get involved in fighting and you will not only shed your blood, you will die a criminal too.

Operations by Soviet forward detachments are not restrained by any limitations. 'The operations of forward detachments must be independent and not restricted by the dividing lines,' the Soviet Military Encyclopaedia declares. The fact that the forward detachments may be cut off from the main force should not deter them. For example, on the advance in Manchuria in 1945 the 6th Guards Tank Army advanced rapidly towards the ocean, having crossed the desert, the apparently impregnable Khingan mountain range and the rice fields, and covering 810 kilometres in eleven days. But ahead of it were forward detachments, operating continually, which had rushed 150 to 200 kilometres ahead of the main force. When the officer in command of the front learnt of this spurt ahead (by quite unprotected detachments, which really had not a single support vehicle with them), he did not order the detachments to slow down; on the contrary, he ordered them to increase their speed still further, and not to worry about the distance separating them, however great it was. The more the forward detachments were separated from the main force, the better. The more unsuspected and strange the appearance of Soviet troops seems to the enemy, the greater the panic and the more successful the operations of both the forward detachments and the main Soviet troops.

Forward detachments were of enormous importance in the last war. 'The speed at which our troops advanced reached at times

eighty to a hundred kilometres a day. Such a speed of advance in operations on such an enormous scale causes surprise even today. But it must always be remembered that this terrible rate of advance was to a great extent made possible by the operations of the forward detachments'. These are the words of Army-General I. I. Gusakovsky, the same general who from January to April 1945, from the Vistula to Berlin itself, commanded the forward detachment of the 11th Guards Tank Corps and the whole of the 1st Guards Tank Army.

In the last war the forward detachments pierced the enemy's defences with dozens of spearheads at the same time, and the main body of troops followed in their tracks. The forward detachments then destroyed in the enemy's rear only targets that were easy to destroy, and in many cases moved forward quickly enough to capture bridges before they were blown up. The reason the enemy had not blown them up was because his main forces were still wholly engaged against the main forces of the Red Army.

The role played by forward detachments has greatly increased in modern warfare. All Soviet military exercises are aimed at improving the operations of forward detachments. There are two very good reasons why the role of the forward detachments has grown in importance. The first is, predictably, that war has acquired a nuclear dimension. Nuclear weapons (and other modern means of fighting) need to be discovered and destroyed at the earliest possible opportunity. And the more Soviet troops there are on enemy territories, the less likelihood there is of their being destroyed by nuclear weapons. It will always be difficult for the enemy to make a nuclear strike against his own rear where not only are his own forces operating, and which are inhabited but where a strike would also be against his own civilian population.

A forward detachment, rushing far ahead and seeking out and destroying missile batteries, airfields, headquarters and communication lines resembles *spetsnaz* both in character and in spirit. It usually has no transport vehicles at all. It carries only what can be found room for in the tanks and armoured transporters, and its operations may last only a short time, until the fuel in the tanks gives out. All the same, the daring and dashing actions of the detachments will break up the enemy's defences, producing chaos

and panic in his rear, and creating conditions in which the main force can operate with far greater chances of success.

In principle *spetsnaz* does exactly the same. The difference is that *spetsnaz* groups have greater opportunities for discovering important targets, whereas forward detachments have greater opportunities than *spetsnaz* for destroying them. Which is why the forward detachment of each regiment is closely linked up with the regiment's reconnaissance company secretly operating deep inside the enemy's defences. Similarly, the forward detachments of divisions are linked directly with divisional reconnaissance battalions, receiving a great deal of information from them and, by their swift reactions, creating better operating conditions for the reconnaissance battalions.

The forward detachment of an army, usually led by the deputy army commander, will be operating at the same time as the army's *spetsnaz* groups who will have been dropped 100 to 500 kilometres ahead. This means that the forward detachment may find itself in the same operational area as the army's *spetsnaz* groups as early as forty-eight hours after the start of the operation. At that point the deputy army commander will establish direct contact with the *spetsnaz* groups, receiving information from them, sometimes redirecting groups to more important targets and areas, helping the groups and receiving help from them. The *spetsnaz* group may, for example, capture a bridge and hold it for a very short time. The forward detachment simply has to be able to move fast enough to get to the bridge and take over with some of its men. The *spetsnaz* group will stay at the bridge, while the forward detachment runs ahead, and then, after the main body of Soviet forces has arrived at the bridge the *spetsnaz* group will again, after briefing, be dropped by parachute far ahead.

Sometimes *spetsnaz* at the front level will operate in the interests of the army's forward detachments, in which case the army's own *spetsnaz* will turn its attention to the most successful forward detachments of the army's divisions.

Forward detachments are a very powerful weapon in the hands of the Soviet commanders, who have great experience in deploying them. They are in reality the best units of the Soviet Army and in the course of an advance will operate not only in a similar way to *spetsnaz*, but in very close collaboration with it too. The success of operations by *spetsnaz* groups in strategic warfare depends ultim-

ately on the skill and fighting ability of dozens of forward detachments which carry out lightning operations to overturn the enemy's plans and frustrate his attempts to locate and destroy the *spetsnaz* groups.

Chapter 13
Spetsnaz and Deception

Secrecy and disinformation are the most effective weapons in the hands of the Soviet Army and the whole Communist system. With the aim of protecting military secrets and of disinforming the enemy a Chief Directorate of Strategic Camouflage (GUSM) was set up within the Soviet General Staff in the 1960s. The Russian term for 'camouflage' – *maskirovka* – is, like the word *razvedka*, impossible to translate directly. *Maskirovka* means everything relating to the preservation of secrets and to giving the enemy a false idea of the plans and intentions of the Soviet high command. *Maskirovka* has a broader meaning than 'deception' and 'camouflage' taken together.

The GUSM and the GRU use different methods in their work but operate on the same battlefield. The demands made of the officers of both organisations are more or less identical. The most important of these demands are: to be able to speak foreign languages fluently; and to know the enemy. It was no coincidence that when the GUSM was set up many senior officers and generals of the GRU were transferred to it. General Moshe Milshtein was one of them, and he had been one of the most successful heads the GRU had had; he spent practically the whole of his career in the West an an illegal.[1] Milshtein speaks English, French and German

[1]See Viktor Suvorov, *Soviet Military Intelligence* (London, 1984).

fluently, and possibly other languages as well. He is the author of a secret textbook for GRU officers entitled *An Honourable Service*. I frequently attended lectures given by him about operations by Soviet 'illegals' and the theory upon which the practice of disinformation is based. But even the briefest study of the writings of this general in Soviet military journals, in the *Military-Historical Journal* (VIZ) for example, reveals that he is one of the outstanding Soviet experts in the field of espionage and disinformation.

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The GUSM is vast. It is continually gathering a colossal number of facts on three key subjects:

1. What the West knows about us.
2. What the West shows us it does not know.
3. What the West is trying to find out.

The GUSM has long-term plans covering what must be concealed and what must have attention drawn to it in the Soviet Army and armaments industry. The experts of the GUSM are constantly fabricating material so that the enemy should draw the wrong conclusions from the authentic information in his possession.

The extent of the powers given to the GUSM can be judged from the fact that at the beginning of the 1970s REB *osnaz* (radio-electronic warfare) was transferred from the control of the KGB to the control of the GUSM, though still preserving the name *osnaz*.

There are very close links existing between the GUSM and the GRU and between *spetsnaz* and the REB *osnaz*. In peacetime the REB *osnaz* transmits by radio 'top-secret' instructions from some Soviet headquarters to others. In time of war *spetsnaz* operations against headquarters and centres and lines of communications are conducted in the closest co-operation with the REB *osnaz*, which is ready to connect up with the enemy's lines of communication to transmit false information. An example of such an operation was provided in the manoeuvres of the Ural military district when a *spetsnaz* company operated against a major headquarters. *Spetsnaz* groups cut the communication lines and 'destroyed' the headquarters and at the same time an

REB *osnaz* company hooked into the enemy's lines and began transmitting instructions to the enemy in the name of the headquarters that had been wiped out.

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Even in peacetime the GUSM operates in a great variety of ways. For example, the Soviet Union derives much benefit from the activities of Western pacifists. A fictitious pacifist movement has been set up in the Soviet Union and Professor Chazov, the personal physician of the General Secretary of the Communist Party, has been made head of it. There are some who say that the movement is controlled by the Soviet leadership through the person of Chazov. Chazov, in addition to being responsible for the health of the General Secretary, is a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, i.e. one of the leaders who has real power in his hands. There are very few people who can manipulate him.

The mighty machinery of the GUSM was brought into operation in order to give this Communist leader some publicity. General Moshe Milshtein himself arrived in London in April 1982 to attend a conference of doctors opposed to nuclear warfare. There were many questions that had to be put to the general. What did he have to do with medicine? Where had he served, in what regiments and divisions? Where had he come by his genuine English accent? Did all Soviet generals speak such good English? And were all Soviet generals allowed to travel to Great Britain and conduct pacifist propaganda, or was it a privilege granted to a select few?

The result of this publicity stunt by the GUSM is well known – the 'pacifist' Chazov, who has never once been known to condemn the murder of children in Afghanistan or the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, and who persecutes opponents of Communism in the USSR, received the Nobel Prize.

'But,' as Stalin said, 'in order to prepare new wars pacifism alone is not enough.'[1] That is why the Soviet leaders are preparing for another war not only with the aid of the pacifists but with the help of many other people and organisations which, knowingly or

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[1] *Leningradskaya Pravda*, 14 July 1928.

unwittingly, spread information which has been 'made in the GUSM'.

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One of the sources spreading Soviet military disinformation is the GRU's network of agents, and in particular the agents of *spetsnaz*.

In the preparation of a strategic operation the GUSM's most important task is to ensure that the operation is totally unexpected by the enemy, particularly the place where it is to take place and the time it is due to start; its nature, and the weapons the troops will be using; and the number of troops and scope of the operation. All these elements must be planned so that the enemy has not prepared to resist. This is achieved by many years of intensive effort on the part of the GUSM at concealment. But concealment is twofold: the GUSM will, for example, conceal from the enemy advances in Soviet military science and the armaments industry, and at the same time demonstrate what the enemy wants to see.

This would provide material for a separate and lengthy piece of research. Here we are dealing only with *spetsnaz* and with what the GUSM does in connection with *spetsnaz*. GUSM experts have developed a whole system aimed at preventing the enemy from being aware of the existence of *spetsnaz* and ensuring that he should have a very limited idea of its strength and the nature of the operations it will conduct. Some of the steps it takes we have already seen. To summarise:

1. Every prospective member of *spetsnaz* is secretly screened for his general reliability long before he is called into the Army.
2. Every man joining *spetsnaz* or the GRU has to sign a document promising not to reveal the secret of its existence. Any violation of this undertaking is punished as spying – by the death sentence.
3. *Spetsnaz* units do not have their own uniform, their own badges or any other distinguishing mark, though it very often uses the uniform of the airborne troops and their badges. Naval *spetsnaz* wear the uniform of the naval infantry although they have nothing in common with that force. *Spetsnaz* units operating midget submarines wear the usual uniform of submariners. When they are in the countries of Eastern Europe the *spetsnaz* units wear the uniform of signals troops.

4. Not a single *spetsnaz* unit is quartered separately. They are all accommodated in military settlements along with airborne or air-assault troops. In the Navy *spetsnaz* units are accommodated in the military settlements of the naval infantry. The fact that they wear the same uniform and go through roughly the same kind of battle training makes it very difficult to detect *spetsnaz*. In Eastern Europe *spetsnaz* is located close to important headquarters because it is convenient to have them along with the signals troops. In the event of their being moved to military settlements belonging to other branches of the forces *spetsnaz* units immediately change uniform.

Agent units in *spetsnaz* are installed near specially well-defended targets – missile bases, penal battalions and nuclear ammunition stores.

5. In the various military districts and groups of forces *spetsnaz* troops are known by different names – as *reidoviki* ('raiders') in East Germany, and as *okhotniki* ('hunters') in the Siberian military district. *Spetsnaz* soldiers from different military districts who meet by chance consider themselves as part of different organisations. The common label *spetsnaz* is used only by officers among themselves.

6. *Spetsnaz* does not have its own schools or academies. The officer class is trained at the Kiev Higher Combined Officers' Training School (reconnaissance faculty) and at the Ryazan Higher Airborne School (special faculty). It is practically impossible to distinguish a *spetsnaz* student among the students of other faculties. Commanding officers and officers concerned with agent work are trained at the Military-Diplomatic Academy (the GRU Academy). I have already mentioned the use made of sports sections and teams for camouflaging the professional core of *spetsnaz*.

There are many other ways of concealing the presence of *spetsnaz* in a particular region and the existence of *spetsnaz* as a whole.

In *spetsnaz* everyone has his own nickname. As in the criminal underworld or at school, a person does not choose his own nickname, but is given it by others. A man may have several at the outset, then some of them are dropped until there remains only the one that sounds best and most pleases the people he works with.

The use of nicknames greatly increases the chances of keeping *spetsnaz* operations secret. The nicknames can be transmitted by radio without any danger. A good friend of mine was given the nickname Racing Pig. Suppose the head of Intelligence in a district sent the following radiogram, uncyphered: 'Racing Pig to go to post No. 10.' What could that tell an enemy if he intercepted it? On the other hand, the commander of the group will know the message is genuine, that it has been sent by one of his own men and nobody else. *Spetsnaz* seldom makes use of radio, and, if the head of Intelligence had to speak to the group again he would not repeat the name but would say another name to the deputy commander of the group: 'Dog's Heart to take orders from Gladiolus,' for example.

Before making a jump behind enemy lines, in battle or in training, a *spetsnaz* soldier will hand over to his company sergeant all his documents, private letters, photographs, everything he does not need on the campaign and everything that might enable someone to determine what unit he belongs to, his name, and so on. The *spetsnaz* soldier has no letters from the Russian alphabet on his clothes or footwear. There may be some figures which indicate the number he is known by in the Soviet armed forces, but that is all. An interesting point is that there are two letters in that number, and for the *spetsnaz* soldier they always select letters which are common to both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets – A, K, X, and so forth. An enemy coming across the corpse of a *spetsnaz* soldier will find no evidence that it is that of a Soviet soldier. One could, of course, guess, but the man could just as easily be a Bulgar, a Pole or a Czech.

■ ■ ■

Spetsnaz operates in exceptionally unfavourable conditions. It can survive and carry out a given mission only if the enemy's attention is spread over a vast area and he does not know where the main blow is to be struck.

With this aim, drops of large numbers of *spetsnaz* troops are not carried out in a single area but in smaller numbers and in several areas at the same time. The dropping zones may be separated from each other by hundreds of kilometres, and apart from the main areas of operation for *spetsnaz* other, subsidiary areas are chosen as well: these are areas of real interest to *spetsnaz*, so as to make

the enemy believe that that is the area where the main *spetsnaz* threat is likely to appear, and they are chosen as carefully as the main ones. The decision as to which area will be a prime one and which a subsidiary is taken by the high command on the very eve of the operation. Sometimes circumstances change so rapidly that a change in the area of operation may take place even as the planes are over enemy territory.

The deception of the enemy over the main and subsidiary areas of operation begins with the deception of the men taking part in the operation. Companies, battalions, regiments and brigades exist as single fighting units. But during the period of training for the operation, groups and detachments are formed in accordance with the actual situation and to carry out a specific task. The strength and armament of each group is worked out specially. Before carrying out an operation every detachment and every group is isolated from the other groups and detachments and is trained to carry out the operation planned for that particular group. The commander and his deputy are given the exact area of operations and are given information about enemy operations in the given area and about operations there by *spetsnaz* groups and detachments. Sometimes this information is very detailed (if groups and detachments have to operate jointly), at others it is only superficial, just enough to prevent neighbouring commanders getting in each other's way.

Sometimes the commander of a group or detachment is told the truth, sometimes he is deceived. A *spetsnaz* officer knows that he can be deceived, and that he cannot always detect with any certainty what is true and what is a lie.

Commanders of groups and detachments who are to take part in operations in reserve areas are usually told that their area is the main one and the most important, that there is already a large force of *spetsnaz* operating there or that such a force will soon appear there. The commander of a group that is operating in the main area may be told, on the contrary, that apart from his groups there are very few groups operating in the area. Irrespective of what the comander is told he is given quite specific tasks, for whose accomplishment he answers with his head in the most literal sense.

In any operation the GRU high command keeps a *spetsnaz* reserve on its own territory. Even in the course of the operation some groups may receive an order to withdraw from the main areas

into the reserve areas. *Spetsnaz* reserves may be dropped into the reserve areas, which then become main areas of operations. In this way the enemy obtains information about *spetsnaz* simultaneously in many areas, and it is exceptionally difficult to determine where the main areas and where the reserve ones are. Consequently the enemy's main forces may be thrown against relatively small groups and detachments which are conducting real military operations but which are none the less a false target for the enemy. Even if the enemy establishes which are the main areas of *spetsnaz* operations the enemy may be too late. Many *spetsnaz* groups and detachments will already be leaving the area, but those that remain there will be ordered to step up their activity; the enemy thus gets the impression that this area is still the main one. So as not to dispel this illusion, the groups remaining in the area are ordered by the Soviet high command to prepare to receive fresh *spetsnaz* reinforcements, are sent increased supplies and are continually told that they are doing the main job. But they are not told that their comrades left the area long ago for a reserve area that has now become a main one.

At the same time as the main and reserve areas are chosen, false areas of operations for *spetsnaz* are set. A false, or phoney, area is created in the following way. A small *spetsnaz* group with a considerable supply of mines is dropped into the area secretly. The group lays the mines on important targets, setting the detonators in such a way that all the mines will blow up at roughly the same time. Then automatic radio transmitters are fixed up in inaccessible places which are also carefully mined. This done, the *spetsnaz* group withdraws from the area and gets involved in operations in a quite different place. Then another *spetsnaz* group is dropped into the same area with the task of carrying out an especially daring operation.

This group is told that it is to be operating in an area of special importance where there are many other groups also operating. At an agreed moment the Soviet air force contributes a display of activity over the particular area. For this purpose real planes are used, which have just finished dropping genuine groups in another area. The route they follow has to be deliberately complicated, with several phoney places where they drop torn parachutes and shroud-lines, airborne troops' equipment, boxes of ammunition, tins of food, and so forth.

Next day the enemy observes the following scene. In an area of dense forest in which there are important targets there are obvious traces of the presence of Soviet parachutists. In many places in the same area there had been simultaneous explosions. In broad daylight a group of Soviet terrorists had stopped the car of an important official on the road and brutally murdered him and got away with his case full of documents. At the same time the enemy had noted throughout the area a high degree of activity by *spetsnaz* radio transmitters using a system of rapid and super-rapid transmission which made it very difficult to trace them. What does the enemy general have to do, with all these facts on his desk?

To lead the enemy further astray *spetsnaz* uses human dummies, clothed in uniform and appropriately equipped. The dummies are dropped in such a way that the enemy sees the drop but cannot immediately find the landing place. For this purpose the drop is carried out over mountains or forests, but far away from inhabited places and places where the enemy's troops are located. The drops are usually made at dawn, sunset or on a moonlit night. They are never made in broad daylight because it is then seen to be an obvious piece of deception, while on a dark night the drop may not be noticed at all.

The enemy will obviously discover first the dummies in the areas which are the *main* places for *spetsnaz* operations. The presence of the dummies may raise doubts in the enemy's mind about whether the dummies indicate that it is not a false target area but the very reverse. . . . The most important thing is to disorient the enemy completely. If there are few *spetsnaz* forces available, then it must be made to appear that there are lots of them around. If there are plenty of them, it should be made to appear that there are very few. If their mission is to destroy aircraft it must look as if their main target is a power station, and *vice versa*. Sometimes a group will lay mines on targets covering a long distance, such as oil pipelines, electricity power lines, roads and bridges along the roads. In such cases they set the first detonators to go off with a very long delay and as they advance they make the delay steadily shorter. The group then withdraws to one side and changes its direction of advance completely. The successive explosions then take place in the opposite direction to the one in which the group was moving.

Along with operations in the main, reserve and false areas there may also be operations by *spetsnaz* professional groups working in

conditions of special secrecy. The Soviet air force plays no part in such operations. Even if the groups are dropped by parachute it takes place some distance away and the groups leave the drop zone secretly. Relatively small but very carefully trained groups of professional athletes are chosen for such operations. Their movements can be so carefully concealed that even their acts of terrorism are carried out in such a way as to give the enemy the impression that the particular tragedy is the result of some natural disaster or of some other circumstances unconnected with Soviet military intelligence or with terrorism in general. All the other activity of *spetsnaz* serves as a sort of cover for such specially trained groups. The enemy concentrates his attention on the main, reserve and false target areas, not suspecting the existence of secret areas in which the organisation is also operating: secret areas which could very easily be the most dangerous for the enemy.

Chapter 14
Future Prospects

Spetsnaz continues to grow. In the first place its ranks are swelling. In the next few years *spetsnaz* companies on the army level are expected to become battalions, and there is much evidence to suggest that this process has already begun. Such a reorganisation would mean an increase in the strength of *spetsnaz* by 10,000 men. But that is not the end of it. Already at the end of the 1970s the possibility was being discussed of increasing the number of regiments at the strategic level from three to five. The brigades at front level could, without any increase in the size of the support units, raise the number of fighting battalions from three or four to five. The possibilities of increasing the strength of *spetsnaz* are entirely realistic and evoke legitimate concern among Western experts.[1]

■ ■ ■

The principal direction being taken by efforts to improve the quality of the *spetsnaz* formations is mechanisation. No one disputes the advantages of mechanisation. A mechanised *spetsnaz* soldier is able to withdraw much more quickly from the dropping zone. He can cover great distances much more quickly and inspect much larger areas than can a soldier on foot. And he can get quickly into contact with the enemy and inflict sudden blows on him, and then get quickly away from where the enemy may strike him and pursue him.

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[1]See Appendices for notes on organisation.

But the problem of mechanisation is a difficult one. The *spetsnaz* soldier operates in forests, marshland, mountains, deserts and even in enormous cities. *Spetsnaz* needs a vehicle capable of transporting a *spetsnaz* soldier in all these conditions, and one that enables him to be as silent and practically invisible as he is now.

There have been many scientific conferences dealing with the question of providing *spetsnaz* with a means of transport, but they have not yet produced any noticeable results. Soviet experts realise that it will not be possible to create a single machine to meet *spetsnaz* needs, and that they will have to develop a whole family of vehicles with various features, each of them intended for operations in particular conditions.

One of the ways of increasing the mobility of *spetsnaz* behind enemy lines is to provide part of the unit with very lightweight motorcycles capable of operating on broken terrain. Various versions of the snow-tractor are being developed for use in northern regions. *Spetsnaz* also uses cross-country vehicles. Some of them amount to no more than a platform half a metre high, a metre and a half wide and two or three metres long mounted on six or eight wheels. Such a vehicle can easily be dropped by parachute, and it has considerable cross-country ability in very difficult terrain, including marshland and sand. It is capable of transporting a *spetsnaz* group for long distances, and in case of necessity the group's base can be moved around on such vehicles while the group operates on foot.

The introduction of such vehicles and motorcycles into *spetsnaz* does more than increase its mobility; it also increases its firepower through the use of heavier armament that can be transported on the vehicles, as well as a larger supply of ammunition.

The vehicles, motorcycles and snow-tractors are developments being decided today, and in the near future we shall see evidence that these ideas are being put into practice. In the more distant future the Soviet high command wants to see the *spetsnaz* soldier airborne. The most likely solution will be for each soldier to have an apparatus attached to his back which will enable him to make jumps of several tens or even hundreds of metres. Such an apparatus could act as a universal means of transport in any terrain, including mountains. Since the beginning of the 1950s intensive research has been going on in the Soviet Union on this

problem. It would appear that there have so far been no tangible achievements in this field, but there has been no reduction in the effort put into the research, despite many failures.

The same objective – to make the *spetsnaz* soldier airborne, or at least capable of big leaps – has also been pursued by the Kamov design office, which has for several decades, along with designing small helicopters, been trying to create a midget helicopter sufficient for just one man. Army-General Margelov once said that 'an apparatus must be created that will eliminate the boundary between the earth and the sky.' Earth-bound vehicles cannot fly, while aircraft and helicopters are defenceless on the ground. Margelov's idea was that they should try to create a very light apparatus that would enable a soldier to flit like a dragon-fly from one leaf to another. What they needed was to turn the Soviet soldier operating behind enemy lines into a sort of insect capable of operating both on the ground and in the air (though not very high up) and also of switching from one state to the other without effort.

Every farmer knows that it is easier to kill a wild buffalo that is ruining his crops than to kill a mass of insects that have descended on his plants at night. The Soviet high command dreams of a day when the neighbour's garden can be invaded not only by buffaloes but by mad elephants too, and swarms of voracious insects at the same time. On a more practical basis for now, intensive research is being conducted in the Soviet Union to develop new ways of dropping men by parachute. The work is testing out a variety of new ideas, one such being the 'container drop', in other words the construction of a container with several men in it which would be dropped on one freight parachute. This method makes it possible to reduce considerably the amount of time set aside for training soldiers how to jump by parachute: training time which can be better spent on more useful things. The container enables the people in it to start firing at targets as they are landing and immediately afterwards. The container method makes it much easier to keep the men together in one spot and solves the problem of assembling a group after it has been dropped. But there are a whole lot of technical problems connected with the development of such containers for air drops, and I am not competent to judge when they may be solved.

Another idea being studied is the possibility of constructing parachutes that can glide; hybrid creations combining the qualities

of the parachute and the hang-glider. This would make it possible for the transport aircraft to fly along the least dangerous routes and to drop the parachutists over safe areas far from the target they are making for. A man using his own gliding parachute can descend slowly or remain at one level or even climb higher. Since they are able to control the direction of their flight the *spetsnaz* groups can approach their targets noiselessly from various directions.

The hang-glider, especially one equipped with a very light motor, is the subject of enormous interest to the GRU. It makes it possible not only to fly from one's own territory to the enemy's territory without using transport planes, but also to make short flights on the enemy's territory so as to penetrate to targets, to evade any threat from the enemy and to perform other tasks.

The hang-glider with a motor (the *motodeltoplan*) is the cheapest flying machine and the one easiest to control. The motor has made it possible to take off from quite small, even patches of ground. It is no longer necessary to clamber up a hillside in order to take off. But the most important feature of the motorised hang-glider is, of course, the concealment it provides. Experiments show that very powerful radar systems are often quite unable to detect a hang-glider. Its flight is noiseless, because the motor is used only for taking off and gaining height. By flying with the motor shut off the man on the hang-glider is protected from heat-seeking means of detection and attack.

The distance that motorised hang-gliders can fly is quite sufficient for *spetsnaz*. It is enough to allow a man to take off quite a long way behind the frontier, cross it and land deep in the enemy's rear. Flight in a dangerous area can be carried out at very low altitudes. They are now developing in the Soviet Union a piece of equipment that will make it possible for motorised hang-gliders to fly at very low altitudes following the contours of the ground. Flights will have to take place at night and in conditions of bad visibility, and a simple, lightweight but reliable navigation aid is being developed too.

The motorised hang-glider can be used for other purposes apart from transporting *spetsnaz* behind the enemy's lines. It can be used for identifying and even for destroying especially important enemy targets. Experiments show that the *deltoplan* can carry light machine-guns, grenade-launchers and rockets, which makes it an exceptionally dangerous weapon in the hands of *spetsnaz*. The

main danger presented by these 'insects' is of course not to be found in their individual qualities but in their numbers. Any insect on its own can easily be swatted. But a swarm of insects is a problem which demands serious thought: it is not easy to find a way of dealing with them.

The officers commanding the GRU know exactly the sort of *deltoplan* that *spetsnaz* needs in the foreseeable future. It has to be a machine that needs no more than twenty-five metres to take off, has a rate of climb of not less than a metre per second, and has a motor with a power of not more than 30 kilowatts which must have good heat isolation and make a noise of not more than 55 decibels. The machine must be capable of lifting a payload of 120 to 150 kilograms (reconnaissance equipment, armaments, ammunition). Work on its development, like the work carried out in the 1930s on the first midget submarines, is being carried on simultaneously and independently by several groups of designers.

The GRU realises that hang-gliders can be very vulnerable in daytime and that they are also very sensitive to changes in the weather. There are three possible ways of overcoming these difficulties: improving the construction of the machines themselves and improving the professional skills of the pilots; employing them suddenly and in large numbers on a wide front, using many combinations of direction and height; and using them only in conjunction with many other weapons and ways of fighting, and the use of a great variety of different devices and tricks to neutralise the enemy.

At the same time as developing ways of dropping people in the enemy's rear, work is being done on methods for returning *spetsnaz* units to their own territory. This is not as important as the business of dropping them; nevertheless there are situations when it is necessary to find some way of transporting someone from a group, or a whole group, back to Soviet territory. For many years now this has sometimes been done with low-flying aircraft, but this is a risky method which has yet to be perfected. Better methods are needed for evacuating men from territories where there is no sea nearby, where the helicopter cannot be used and where an aircraft cannot land.

■ ■ ■

A Soviet general named Meshcheryakov opened up a vast area for study and research when he made the proposal that the armed forces

should 'create for *spetsnaz* the kind of conditions in which no one should interfere with its work'. There are many problems here which Soviet science is concentrating on trying to solve. Who interferes with the work of *spetsnaz*? Primarily the enemy's radar system. Radar installations interfere with the activity of the entire Soviet Army. In order to open the way for the Soviet Army into the territory of the enemy it is necessary first of all to 'blind' the enemy's radar system. That is always one of *spetsnaz*'s principal tasks. But to carry it out, the radars obstructing *spetsnaz* itself have somehow to be put out of action. One solution to this problem is, prior to dropping the main *spetsnaz* force, to send small groups behind the enemy's lines who will clear the way for *spetsnaz* which will in turn clear the way for the whole Soviet Army. Such a solution can be regarded as satisfactory only because no other solution has so far been found. But terrific effort is being put into the work of finding some other solution. The Soviet high command needs a technical solution, some method that would make it possible, even for a short period, simultaneously to 'blind' the enemy's radar over a fairly wide area, so as to give the first wave of *spetsnaz* the opportunity to carry out its mission.

Anti-aircraft systems are the main killers of *spetsnaz*. The soldier in a transport aircraft is utterly defenceless. One quite small missile, or even a shell, can kill *spetsnaz* troops in whole groups. What can be done to put out of action the anti-aircraft defence systems at least on a narrow sector before the arrival of the main force of *spetsnaz* on the enemy's territory? Much thought is being devoted to this. The solution may be technical. GRU's spies may help. But *spetsnaz* can help itself by recruiting an agent long before the war begins and teaching him what to do on receipt of a sign from the centre.

Once it has arrived in enemy territory *spetsnaz* is vulnerable from the moment of landing to the moment of meeting up with its own troops.

In order to increase its effectiveness and create conditions in which 'no one should interfere with its work' intensive work is being done on the development of jamming stations to be used in areas where *spetsnaz* is operating, to prevent the enemy's electronic devices (radio receivers and transmitters, radars, optical-electronic devices, computers and any other instruments) from working normally so as to interfere with the co-ordination of the various enemy forces operating against *spetsnaz*.

Aircraft and helicopters cause a great deal of trouble for *spetsnaz*. *Spetsnaz* already has fairly impressive means of its own for defending itself from air attacks, but work is now going on to provide *spetsnaz* groups with a reliable anti-helicopter weapon, and to develop a weapon capable of covering considerable areas or even of establishing zones free of all air activity by the enemy.

Finally, weapons systems are being developed of which the main purpose will be to isolate fairly large areas from penetration by the enemy's ground forces. This involves the use of mines and automatic guns mounted and hidden near bridges, crossroads, tunnels and so forth, which operate automatically and destroy the enemy trying to transfer reinforcements into the area where *spetsnaz* is operating and so to interfere with its work.

■ ■ ■

The process of seeking out especially important targets in the enemy's territory will in future be carried out not so much by *spetsnaz* men on foot or even 'jumping' as by automatic machines of a fairly simple (not by today's standards perhaps, but certainly by tomorrow's) and reliable construction.

Work has been going on for quite a long time on the development of light (up to 100 kilograms) cross-country vehicles with remote control. The vehicles tested have mostly been driven by electricity. They have been steered by remote control with the aid of television cameras installed inside them, similar to some modern bomb-disposal equipment. Apart from using them to find the targets, experiments have been conducted into using them to destroy targets by means of a grenade-launcher mounted in the vehicle or an explosive charge that detonates on contact with the target. The rapid advances in electronics open up enormous possibilities for the development of light remote-controlled vehicles capable of covering large areas quickly and noiselessly and of destroying targets in enemy territory.

Pilotless aircraft have long been used for identifying targets over large areas, and the Soviet Union is a leader in this field. Take, for example, the Soviet strategic high-flying pilotless rocket-driven plane known as the 'Yastreb'. A tremendous amount of work is being done on the development of relatively small pilotless spy-planes. In the future such planes will take off not only from Soviet territory but from enemy territory as well. Soviet airborne troops

and *spetsnaz* have for long been very keenly interested in the possibility of developing a very light pilotless aircraft that could be put together and launched on enemy territory, survey vast areas and transmit a picture to Soviet troops. The ideal aircraft would be one carrying not only the equipment for carrying out reconnaissance but an explosive charge as well. Once it discovered the target and transmitted a picture of it, it could attack it independently. There is nothing fantastic about this plan. Modern technology is quite capable of building such an aircraft. The problem is simply to make the aircraft sufficiently light, cheap, reliable and accurate.

Advances in *spetsnaz* follow the usual paths. While this research goes on at the cutting edge of Soviet military power: improvements are being made to the familiar weapons and increases in the range, accuracy and fire-power of grenade-launchers, rifles and other armaments; improvements in the quality of footwear, clothes, soldiers' equipment and means of communication of all kinds; and reductions in the weight of weapons like mines along with an increase in their destructive potential.

Chapter 15
Spetsnaz's First World War

I was standing on the top of an enormous skyscraper in New York when I saw King Kong. The huge gorilla surveyed Manhattan triumphantly from a dizzy height. Of course I knew it wasn't real. But there was something both frightening and symbolic in that huge black figure.

I learnt later that the gorilla was a rubber one, that it had been decided to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the showing of the first film about King Kong by creating a gigantic inflatable model of the beast and placing it high above New York. The rubber monster was hauled up and swayed about in the wind. From the technical point of view the operation had been a real triumph by the engineers and workmen who had taken part in it. But it was not an entire success. The monster turned out to be too huge, with the result that holes appeared in its body through which the air could escape. So the gigantic muscular frame quickly collapsed into a shapeless bag. They had to pump more air into it, but the harder they pumped the bigger the holes became and the quicker the air escaped from the monster. So they had to keep on pumping. . . .

The Communist leaders have also created a rubber monster and have hauled it up to a dizzy height. The monster is known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Soviet leaders are faced with a dilemma: to expand or to decline rapidly and become a flabby sack. It is interesting to note that the Soviet Union became a superpower in the course of the most destructive war in the

history of civilisation, in spite of the fact that it suffered the greatest loss of life and the greatest destruction on its own territory. It has become a military superpower and perhaps war is essential for its existence.

I do not know how or when World War Three will start. I do not know exactly how the Soviet high command plans to make use of *spetsnaz* in that war: the first world war in which *spetsnaz* will be a major contributor. I do not wish to predict the future. In this chapter I shall describe how *spetsnaz* will be used at the beginning of that war as I imagine it. It is not my task to describe what will happen. But I can describe what *might happen*.

■ ■ ■

The last month of peace, as in other wars, has an almost palpable air of crisis about it. Incidents, accidents, small disasters add to the tension. Two trains collide on a railway bridge in Cologne because the signalling system is out of order. The bridge is seriously damaged and there can be no traffic over it for the next two months.

In the port of Rotterdam a Polish supertanker bursts into flames. Because of an error by the captain the tanker is far too close to the oil storage tanks on the shore, and the burning oil spreads around the harbour. For two weeks fire brigades summoned from practically the whole country fight an heroic battle with the flames. The port suffers tremendous losses. The fire appears to have spread at a quite incredible speed, and some experts are of the opinion that the Polish tanker was not the only cause of the fire, that the fire broke out simultaneously in many places.

In the Panama Canal the *Varna*, a Bulgarian freighter loaded with heavy containers, rams the lock gates by mistake. Experts reckoned that the ship should have remained afloat, but for some reason she sinks there and then. To reopen the canal could well take many months. The Bulgarian government sends its apologies and declares itself ready to pay for all the work involved.

In Washington, as the President's helicopter is taking off, several shots are fired at it from sniper's rifles. The helicopter is only slightly damaged and the crew succeed in bringing it down again safely. No one in the craft is hurt. Responsibility for the attack is claimed by a previously unknown organisation calling itself 'Revenge for Vietnam'.

There is a terrorist explosion at Vienna airport.

A group of unidentified men attack the territory of the British military base in Cyprus with mortars.

A serious accident takes place on the most important oil pipeline in Alaska. The pumping stations break down and the flow of oil falls to a trickle.

In West Germany there are several unsuccessful attempts on the lives of American generals.

In the North Sea the biggest of the British oil rigs tips over and sinks. The precise reason for this is not established, although experts believe that corrosion of main supports is the culprit.

In the United States an epidemic of some unidentified disease breaks out and spreads rapidly. It seems to affect port areas particularly, such as San Francisco, Boston, Charleston, Seattle, Norfolk and Philadelphia.

There are explosions practically every day in Paris. The main targets are the government districts, communication centres and military headquarters. At the same time terrible forest fires are raging in the South of France.

All these operations – because of course none of these events is an accident – and others like them are known officially in the GRU as the 'preparatory period', and unofficially as the 'overture'. The overture is a series of large and small operations the purpose of which is, before actual military operations begin, to weaken the enemy's morale, create an atmosphere of general suspicion, fear and uncertainty, and divert the attention of the enemy's armies and police forces to a huge number of different targets, each of which may be the object of the next attack.

The overture is carried by agents of the secret services of the Soviet satellite countries and by mercenaries recruited by intermediaries. The principal method employed at this stage is 'grey terror', that is, a kind of terror which is not conducted in the name of the Soviet Union. The Soviet secret services do not at this stage leave their visiting cards, or leave other people's cards. The terror is carried out in the name of already existing extremist groups not connected in any way with the Soviet Union, or in the name of fictitious organisations.

The GRU reckons that in this period its operations should be regarded as natural disasters, actions by forces beyond human control, mistakes committed by people, or as terrorist acts by organisations not connected with the Soviet Union.

The terrorist acts carried out in the course of the 'overture' require very few people, very few weapons and little equipment. In some cases all that may be needed is one man who has as a weapon nothing more than a screwdriver, a box of matches or a glass ampoule. Some of the operations can have catastrophic consequences. For example, an epidemic of an infectious disease at seven of the most important naval bases in the West could have the effect of halving the combined naval might of the Soviet Union's enemies.

The 'overture' could last from several weeks to several months, gradually gathering force and embracing fresh regions. At the same time the GUSM would become involved. Photographs compromising a NATO chief appear on the front pages of Western newspapers. A scandal explodes. It appears that some of the NATO people have been having meetings with high-ranking Soviet diplomats and handing over top secret papers. All efforts to refute the story only fuel the fire. The public demands the immediate dismissal of NATO'S chiefs and a detailed enquiry. Fresh details about the affair are published in the papers and the scandal increases in scope. At that moment the KGB and GRU can take out and dust off a tremendous quantity of material and put it into circulation. The main victims now are the people whom the Soviets had tried to recruit but failed. Now carefully edited and annotated materials get into the hands of the press. Soviet Intelligence has tried to recruit thousands, even tens of thousands, of people in its time. They include young lieutenants who have now become generals and third secretaries who have now become ambassadors. All of them rejected Soviet efforts to recruit them, and now Soviet Intelligence avenges their refusal. The number of scandalous affairs increases. The nations discover to their surprise that there are very few people to be trusted. The Soviet intelligence service has nothing to lose if the press gets hold of material showing that it tried to recruit a French general, without saying how the attempt ended. It has even less to lose on the eve of war. That is why the newspapers are full of demands for investigations and reports of resignations, dismissals and suicides. The best way of killing a general is to kill him with his own hands.

There is a marked increase in the strength of the peace movement. In many countries there are continual demands to make the country neutral and not to support American foreign

policy, which has been discredited. At this point the 'grey terror' gathers scope and strength and in the last days of peace reaches its peak.

From the first moment of the first day of war the main forces of *spetsnaz* go into action. From then on the terror is conducted in the name of the Soviet Union and of the Communist leadership: 'red terror'.

But between the 'grey' and the 'red' terror there may be an intermediate period – the 'pink' terror, when active military operations have not yet begun and there is still peace, but when some of the best *spetsnaz* units have already gone into action. The situation is complicated by the fact that, on the one hand, Soviet fighting units are already in battle, but that, on the other hand, they are not yet operating in the name of the Soviet Union. This is an exceptionally risky moment for the Soviet high command. But he who risks nothing gains nothing. The Soviet commanders want to gain a great deal, and so are ready to risk a lot. A great deal has of course been done to reduce the level of risk. Only a relatively small number of *spetsnaz* troops take part in the 'pink' terror, but they are the best people in *spetsnaz* – professional athletes of Olympic class. Everything has been done to make sure that not one of them should fall into the hands of the enemy before the outbreak of war. A great deal has also been done to ensure that, if one of them should fall into enemy hands at that moment, it would be very difficult to establish his connection with any country whatsoever.

The 'pink' terror may continue for no more than a few hours. But those are the most important hours and minutes – the very last hours and minutes of peace. It is very important that those hours and minutes should be spoilt for the enemy and used for the maximum advantage to the Soviet side. It must be pointed out that the 'pink' terror may not be carried out at all. It is used only when there is absolute certainty of the success of the operations and equal certainty that the enemy will not be able in the remaining hours and minutes to assess the situation correctly and strike the first pre-emptive blow.

■ ■ ■

For Soviet Communists the month of August has a special significance. It was in August that the First World War began,

which resulted in revolutions in Russia, Germany and Hungary. In August 1939 Georgi Zhukov succeeded in doing something that no one before him had managed to do: with a sudden blow he routed a group of Japanese forces in the Far East. It is possible that that blow had very far-reaching consequences: Japan decided against attacking the Soviet Union and chose to advance in other directions. Also in August 1939 a pact was signed in the Kremlin which opened the flood gates for the Second World War, as a result of which the USSR became a super-power. In August 1945 the Soviet Union carried out a treacherous attack on Japan and Manchuria. In the course of three weeks of intensive operations huge territories roughly equal in area and population to Eastern Europe were 'liberated'. In August 1961 the Soviet Union built the Berlin Wall, in violation of international agreements it had signed. In August 1968 the Soviet Army 'liberated' Czechoslovakia and, to its great surprise, did not meet with any opposition from the West.

Suppose the Soviet Communists again choose August for starting a war. . . .

■ ■ ■

On 12 August, at 0558 local time, a van comes to a halt on the vast empty parking lot in front of a supermarket in Washington. Three men open the doors of the van, roll out the fuselage of a light aircraft and attach its wings. A minute later its motor bursts into life. The plane takes off and disappears into the sky. It has no pilot. It is controlled by radio with the aid of very simple instruments, only slightly more complicated than those used by model aircraft enthusiasts. The plane climbs to about 200 metres and immediately begins to descend in the direction of the White House. A minute later a mighty explosion shakes the capital of the United States. The screaming of sirens on police cars, fire engines and ambulances fills the city.

Three minutes later a second plane sweeps across the centre of the city and there is a second explosion in the place where the White House once stood. The second plane has taken off from a section of highway under construction, and has a quite different control system. Two cars with radio beacons in them have been left earlier in the middle of the city. The beacons have switched on automatically a few seconds before the plane's take-off. The automatic pilot is guided by the two beacons and starts to descend

according to a previously worked-out trajectory. The second plane has been sent off by a second group operating independently of the first one.

It was a simple plan: if the first plane did not destroy the White House the second would. If the first plane did destroy the White House then a few minutes later all the heads of the Washington police would be near where the explosion had taken place. The second plane would kill many of them.

At 0606 all radio and television channels interrupt their normal programmes and report the destruction of the White House and the possible death of the President of the United States.

At 0613 the programme known as *Good Morning America* is interrupted and the Vice-President of the USA appears. He announces a staggering piece of news: there has been an attempt to seize power in the country on the part of the leaders of the armed forces. The President of the United States has been killed. The Vice-President appeals to everyone in the armed forces to remain where they are and not to carry out any orders from senior officers for the next twenty-four hours, because the orders would be issued by traitors shortly to be removed from their posts and arrested.

Soon afterwards many television channels across the country cease transmitting. . . .

■ ■ ■

The Soviet military leaders know that if it doesn't prove possible to destroy the President of the United States in peacetime, it will be practically impossible to do so at a time of crisis. The President will be in an underground, or airborne, command post, somewhere extremely inaccessible and extremely well guarded.

Consequently the leaders, while not abandoning attempts to kill the President (for which purpose several groups of assassins with every kind of weapon, including anti-aircraft missiles, have been dropped in the country), decide to carry out an operation aimed at causing panic and confusion. If it proves impossible to kill the President then they will have to reduce his capacity to rule the country and its armed forces at the most critical moment.

To carry out this task the Soviets have secretly transferred to Washington a *spetsnaz* company from the first *spetsnaz* regiment at the strategic level. A large part of the company is made up of women. The entire complement of the company is professional

athletes of Olympic standard. It has taken several months to transfer the whole company to Washington. The athletes have arrived in the guise of security men, drivers and technicians working in the Soviet embassy and other Soviet establishments, and their weapons and equipment have been brought in in containers covered by diplomatic privilège. The company has been split into eight groups to carry out its mission. Each group has its own organisation, structure, weapons and equipment. To carry out their tasks some of the groups will have to make contact with secret agents recruited a long time previously by the GRU *rezidentura*.

On 11 August the GRU *rezident* in Washington, a major-general known by the code-name of 'Mudry' (officially a civilian and a high-ranking diplomat) receives an encyphered telegram consisting of one single word – 'Yes'. On the *rezident*'s orders the *spetsnaz* company leave their places of work. Some of them simply go back home. Some are transported secretly in the boots of their cars by GRU officers and dropped in the woods round the city, in empty underground garages and other secluded places.

The group commanders gather their groups together in previously agreed places and set about carrying out their tasks.

Group No. 1 consists of three men and the group is backed up by one secret agent. The agent works as a mechanic at an airport. In his spare time he builds flying models of aircraft of various sizes. This particular model was designed by the best Soviet aircraft designers and put together in America from spares bought in the open market. The agent himself does not play any part in the operation. A van containing a light radio-guided aircraft and its separate wings has been standing in his garage for some months. What the aircraft is for and to whom it belongs the agent does not know. He only knows that someone has the keys to the garage and that that person can at any moment come and take the van along with the aircraft. In the middle of the night the *spetsnaz* group drives the van out into the forest where they take the explosive charges from a secret hiding place and prepare the plane for flight. At dawn the van is standing in the deserted parking lot.

Group No. 2 is doing roughly the same at that time. But this group has three agents working for it, two of whom have left their cars with radio beacons parked in precisely defined spots in the centre of the city.

Group No. 3 consists of fifteen *spetsnaz* men and five experts from the REB *osnaz*. They are all wearing police uniforms. At night the group kidnaps the director of a television company and his family. Leaving the family at home as hostages guarded by three *spetsnaz* men, the rest of the group make their way to the studios, capturing two more highly placed officials on their way, also as hostages, but without giving cause for noise or panic among the staff. Then, with guns threatening them and supervised by Soviet electronics experts, the director and his assistants insert, instead of the usual advertising programme, a video cassette which the commander of the group has given him. The video cassette has been made up in advance in the Soviet Union. The role of the Vice-President is played by an actor.

The Soviet high command knows that it is very difficult to cut into American military channels. If it is at all possible, then at best it will be possible to do no more than overhear conversations or interrupt them. It is practically impossible to use them for transmitting false orders at the strategic level. That is why it is decided to make use of the civilian television network: it is difficult to get into a television studio, but it is possible and there are many to choose from. Operations are carried out simultaneously in several different cities against various TV companies. If the operation succeeds in only one city it will not matter – millions of people will be disoriented at the most critical moment.

The operational plan has provided that, just after the 'Vice-President' has spoken several retransmitters will be destroyed by other *spetsnaz* groups and one of the American communication satellites will be shot down 'by mistake' by a Soviet satellite. This is intended to deprive the President and the real Vice-President of the opportunity to refute the false declaration.

But events do not go entirely according to plan. The President succeeds in addressing the people and issuing a denial of the report. After the television network throughout America has suffered such major damage, the radio immediately becomes the principal means of communication. Radio commentators produce different commentaries about what is happening. The majority of them report that it is difficult to say which report is genuine and which was false, but that the only fact about which there is no doubt is that the White House has been destroyed.

At the moment when all these events are taking place in

Washington another *spetsnaz* company from the same regiment is ordered by the GRU *rezident* in New York to carry out the same operation but on a much larger scale. They do not make use of radio-guided aircraft, but seize two television studios and one radio studio which they use for transmitting the same false report. Five other *spetsnaz* groups emerge from official Soviet offices and make open, armed attacks on underground cables and some radio and TV transmitting and receiving aerials. They manage to damage them and also some transformer stations, as a result of which millions of TV screens go blank.

A few hours later *spetsnaz* detachment I-M-7 of 120 men lands in New York harbour from a freighter sailing under a Liberian flag. Using its fire-power the detachment makes its way to the nearest subway station and, splitting into small groups and seizing a train with hostages, sets about destroying the underground communications of the city.

In the area around the berths of America's huge aircraft-carriers and nuclear submarines in Norfolk, several mini-subs are discovered, as well as underwater saboteurs with aqualungs.

In Alaska eighteen different places are recorded where small groups have tried to land from Soviet naval vessels, submarines and aircraft. Some of the groups have been destroyed as they landed, others have managed to get back to their ships or, after landing successfully, hidden in the forests.

Spetsnaz detachment I-S-7 consisting of eighty-two men lands on the coast of Mexico, immediately commandeers private cars, and the next night, using their fire-power and new mobility, cross the United States border.

Small *spetsnaz* groups land and use routes and methods employed by illegal immigrants, while others make use of paths and methods used by drug dealers.

Islands and the military installations on them are more vulnerable to sabotage operations, and at the same moment *spetsnaz* groups are landing on Okinawa and Guam, on Diego Garcia, in Greenland and dozens of other islands on which the West has bases.

■ ■ ■

Spetsnaz group 2-S-13 has spent three weeks aboard a small Soviet fishing vessel fishing close to the shores of Ireland. On receiving

the signal '393939' the ship's captain gives the order to cut the nets, switch off the radio, radar and navigation lights and set course at top speed for the shores of Great Britain.

In darkness two light speed-boats are lowered from the side of the ship. They are big enough to take the whole group. In the first boat is the group commander, a lieutenant with the code-name of 'Shakespeare', a radio operator, a machine-gunner and two snipers. In the second boat is the deputy group commander, a junior lieutenant with the code-name 'Poet', two soldiers with flame-throwers and two snipers. Each man has a supply of food for three days, which is supposed to be used only in the event of being pursued for a long period. For general purposes the group has to obtain its food independently, as best it can. The group also includes two huge German shepherd dogs.

After landing the group the little fishing vessel, still without lights or radio, puts out into the open sea. The ship's captain is hoping to hide away in a neutral port in Ireland. If the vessel is stopped at sea by a British naval patrol the captain and his crew have nothing to fear: the dangerous passengers have left the fishing boat and all traces of their presence on it have already been removed.

'Shakespeare's' group lands on a tiny beach close to Little Haven. The landing place has been chosen long ago, and very well chosen: the beach is shut in on three sides by huge cliffs, so that even in daytime it is impossible to see from a distance what is going on on the beach itself.

At the same time as 'Shakespeare' four other *spetsnaz* groups are going ashore in different places two or three kilometres apart. Operating independently of each other, these four groups arrive by different routes at the little village of Brawdy and at 3.30 in the morning they make a simultaneous attack from different directions on a large building belonging to the United States Navy. According to reports received by the GRU, hundreds, and possibly thousands, of acoustic listening posts have been set up in the region of the Atlantic Ocean. The underwater cables from these posts come together at Brawdy where hundreds of American experts analyse with the aid of a computer a huge amount of information about the movement of submarines and surface ships all over the North Atlantic. According to the GRU's information similar establishments have been set up in Antigua in the Azores, in Hofn

and Keflavik in Iceland, in Hawaii and on Guam. The GRU's commanding officers are aware that their information about Brawdy may not be accurate. But the decision has been taken to attack and destroy the Brawdy monitoring station and all the others as well. The four attacking groups have been given the task of killing as many as possible of the technical staff of the station and of destroying as much as possible of the electronic apparatus, and everything that will burn must be burnt. Mines must be laid at the approaches to the building. All four groups can then depart in different directions.

The 'Shakespeare' group takes no part in the raid. Its task, beginning with the following night, is to lay the mines at the approaches to the building. Apart from that, with sniper fire and open attacks, the group has to make it difficult for anyone to attempt to save or restore the station. The group commander knows that the four neighbouring groups which are taking part in the attack are nearby and are doing the same. But the group commander does not know everything. He does not know that *spetsnaz* detachment 2-S-2, under the command of a major known as 'Uncle Kostya', has landed in the area of St David's. Detachment 2-S-2 consists of fifty-six men, fifteen lightweight motorcycles and six small cars with a considerable supply of ammunition. The detachment's task is to move rapidly, using secondary and forest roads and in some cases even the main roads, and reach the Forest of Dean to organise a base there. The Forest of Dean is a wonderful place for *spetsnaz* operations. It is a hilly area covered with dense forest. At one time it was an important industrial region. There are still the remains of the abandoned coal mines and quarries and railway tunnels, although it is a long time since there was any railway there. Once firmly established in that forest 'Uncle Kostya' can strike out in any direction: nearby there is a nuclear power station, the Severn bridge, a railway tunnel beneath the river Severn, the port of Bristol, the GCHQ government communications centre at Cheltenham, very important military factories also at Bristol and a huge munitions dump at Welford. The GRU believes that it is somewhere in this area that the Royal Family would be sent in the event of war, and that would be a very important target.

The four *spetsnaz* groups which have taken part at the outset in the operation against Brawdy depart immediately after the attack and make their different ways to the Forest of Dean where they can

join up with Uncle Kostya's detachment. Shakespeare knows nothing about this. The large-scale raid on Brawdy and Shakespeare's continued activity in the following days and nights ought to give the enemy the impression that this is one of the main areas of operation for *spetsnaz*.

Meanwhile *spetsnaz* group 2-C-41, of twelve men, has been landed at night near the port of Felixstowe from the catamaran *Double Star*. The boat is sailing under the Spanish flag. The group has left the catamaran in the open sea and swum ashore with aqualungs. There it has been met by a *spetsnaz* agent recruited some years previously. He has at the GRU's expense bought a small motorcycle shop, and his shop has always had available at least fifteen Japanese motorcycles all ready for the road, along with several sets of leather jackets, trousers and crash helmets. The group (containing some of the best motorcyclists in the Soviet Union) changes its clothes, its weapons are wrapped in tarpaulin, the *spetsnaz* agent and his family are killed and their bodies hidden in the cellar of their house, and the motorcycle gang then rushes off at a great speed along the A45 in the direction of Mildenhall. Its task is to set up automatic Strela-Blok anti-aircraft missiles in the area of the base and knock out one of the most important American air bases in Europe, used regularly by F-111s. Afterwards the group is to make for the nearest forest and link up with *spetsnaz* detachment 2-C-5.

The group commander does not know that at the same time and not far away from him ten other *spetsnaz* groups, each working independently, are carrying out similar operations against the American military bases at Woodbridge, Bentwaters and Lakenheath.

■ ■ ■

The motor yacht *Maria* was built in Italy. In the course of a decade she has changed owners several times and visited the oceans of the world until she was sold to some wealthy person, after which she has not been seen for several years in any port in the world. But when the international situation takes a turn for the worse the *Maria* appears in the North Sea sailing under a Swedish flag. After some modernisation the appearance of the yacht has changed somewhat. On receiving the signal '393939' the *Maria* travels at full speed towards the coast of Great Britain. When it is inside British

territorial waters and within range of Fylingdales Moor the yacht's crew removes hatch covers to reveal two BM–23 Katusha-like multi-barrelled missile-launchers. The sailors quickly aim the weapon at the gigantic spheres and fire. Seventy-two heavy shells explode around the installation, causing irreparable harm to the early warning system. The sailors on the yacht put on their aqualungs and jump overboard. For two hours the yacht drifts close to the shore without a crew. When the police clamber aboard, she explodes and sinks.

■ ■ ■

For operations against NATO forces in Central Europe the Soviet high command has concentrated an immensely powerful collection of forces consisting of the 1st and 2nd Western Fronts in East Germany, the 3rd Western Front in Poland, the Central Front in Czechoslovakia and the Group of Tank Armies in Belorussia. This makes fifteen armies altogether, including the six tank armies. On the right flank of this collection of forces there is the combined Baltic Fleet. And deep in Soviet territory another five fronts are being built up (fifteen armies altogether) for supporting attack.

On 12 August at 2300 hours *spetsnaz* battalions drawn from the seven armies of the first echelon cross the frontier of Western Germany on motorised hang-gliders, ordinary gliders and gliding parachutes. Operating in small groups, each battalion strikes at the enemy's radar installations, concentrating its efforts on a relatively narrow sector so as to create a sort of corridor for its planes to fly through. Apart from these seven corridors, another one of strategic importance is created. It was for this purpose that back in July the 13th *spetsnaz* brigade arrived in East Germany from the Moscow military district on the pretext that it was a military construction unit and based itself in the Thuringer Wald. The brigade is now split into sixty groups scattered about the forests of the Spessart and Odenwald hills, and faced with the task of destroying the anti-aircraft installations, especially the radar systems. In the first wave there are altogether 130 *spetsnaz* groups dropped with a total of some 3300 troops.

Two hours after the men have been dropped, the Soviet air force carries out a mass night raid on the enemy's anti-aircraft installations. The combined blow struck by the air force and *spetsnaz* makes it possible to clear one large and several smaller corridors

through the anti-aircraft defence system. These corridors are used immediately for another mass air attack and a second drop of *spetsnaz* units.

Simultaneously, advance detachments of the seven armies cross the frontier and advance westwards.

At 0330 hours on 13 August the second wave of *spetsnaz* forces is dropped from Aeroflot aircraft operating at very low heights with heavy fighter cover.

The Central Front drops its *spetsnaz* brigade in the heavily wooded mountains near Freiburg. The brigade's job is to destroy the important American, West German and French headquarters, lines of communication, aircraft on the ground and anti-aircraft defences. This brigade is, so to speak, opening the gates into France, into which will soon burst several fronts and a further wave of *spetsnaz*.

The 1st and 2nd Western Fronts drop their *spetsnaz* brigades in Germany to the west of the Rhine. This part of West Germany is the furthest away from the dangerous eastern neighbour and consequently all the most vulnerable targets are concentrated there: headquarters, command posts, aerodromes, nuclear weapon stores, colossal reserves of military equipment, ammunition and fuel.

The *spetsnaz* brigade of the 1st Western Front is dropped in the Aachen area. Here there are several large forests where bases can be organised and a number of very tempting targets: bridges across the Rhine which would be used for bringing up reserves and supplying the NATO forces fighting to the east of the Rhine, the important air bases of Brüggen and Wildenrath, the residence of the German government and West Germany's civil service in Bonn, important headquarters near München-Gladbach, and the Geilenkirchen air base where the E–3A early-warning aircraft are based. It is in this area that the Soviet high command plans to bring into the battle the 20th Guards Army, which is to strike southwards down the west bank of the Rhine. The *spetsnaz* brigade is busy clearing the way for the columns of tanks which are soon to appear here.

The *spetsnaz* brigade of the 2nd Western Front has been dropped in the Kaiserslautern area with the task of neutralising the important air base and the air force command posts near Ramstein and Zweibrücken and of destroying the nuclear weapons stores at

Pirmasens. The place where the brigade has been dropped is where, according to the plan of the Soviet high command, the two arms of the gigantic pincer movement are to close together: the 20th Guards Army advancing from the north and the 8th Guards Tank Army striking from Czechoslovakia in the direction of Karlsruhe. After this the second strategic echelon will be brought into action to inflict a crushing defeat on France.

At the same time the Soviet high command understands that to win the war it has to prevent the large-scale transfer of American troops, arms and equipment to Western Europe. To solve the problem the huge Soviet Northern Fleet will have to be brought out into the Atlantic and be kept supplied there. The operations of the fleet will have to be backed up by the Air Force. But for the fleet to get out into the Atlantic it will have to pass through a long corridor between Norway and Greenland and Iceland. There the Soviet fleet will be exposed to constant observation and attack by air forces, small ships and submarines operating out of the fjords and by a huge collection of radio-electronic instruments and installations.

Norway, especially its southern part, is an exceptionally important area for the Soviet military leaders. They need to seize southern Norway and establish air and naval bases there in order to fight a battle for the Atlantic and therefore for Central Europe. The Soviet high command has allotted at least one entire front consisting of an airborne division, considerable naval forces and a brigade of *spetsnaz*. But airlifting ammunition, fuel, foodstuffs and reinforcements to the military, air and naval bases in Norway presents great problems of scale. So there have to be good and safe roads to the bases in southern Norway. Those roads lie in Sweden.

In the past Sweden was lucky: she always remained on the sidelines in a conflict. But at the end of the twentieth century the balance of the battlefield is changing. Sweden has become one of the most important strategic points in the world. If war breaks out the path of the aggressor will lie across Sweden. The occupation of Sweden is made easier by the fact that there are no nuclear weapons on its territory, so that the Soviet leaders risk very little. They know, however, that the Swedish soldier is a very serious opponent – thoughtful, disciplined, physically strong and tough, well armed, well acquainted with the territory he will have to fight over, and well trained for action in such terrain. The experience of

the war against Finland teaches that in Scandinavia frontal attacks with tanks do not produce brilliant results. It requires the use of special tactics and special troops: *spetsnaz*.

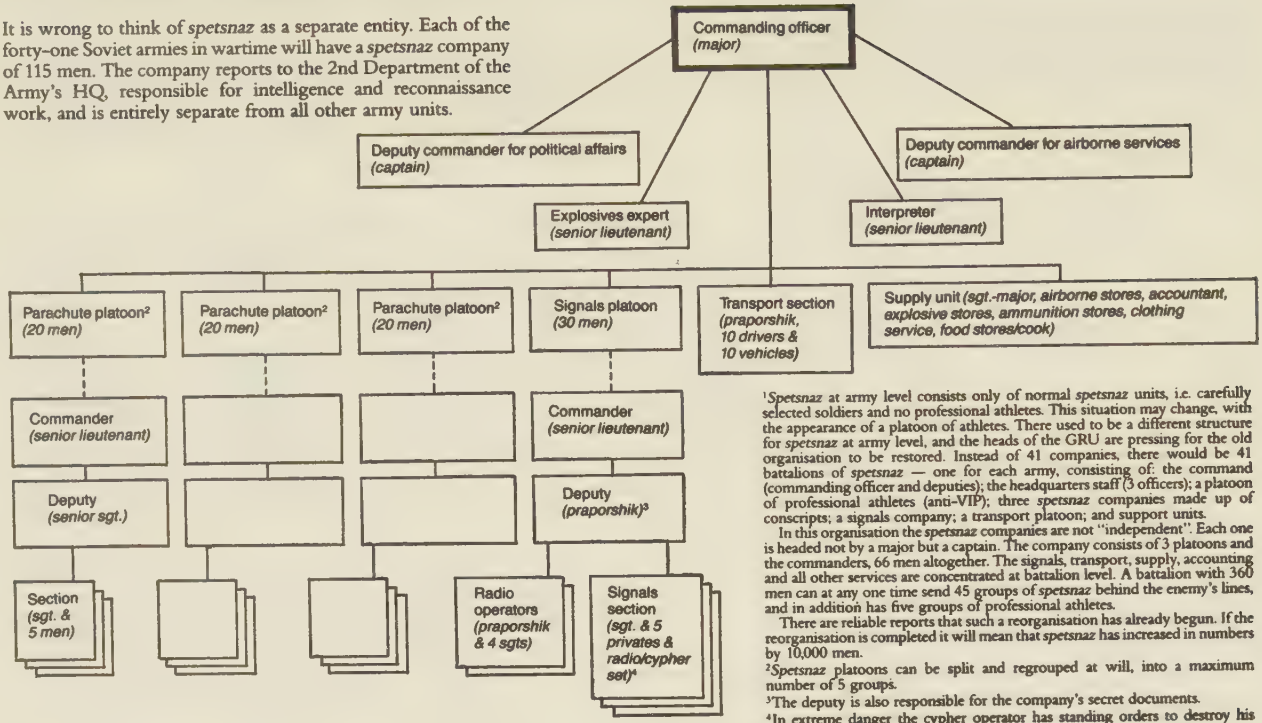
And so it goes on, all over the world. In Sweden the capital city is reduced to a state of panic by the murder of several senior government figures and arson and bombing attacks on key buildings and ordinary civilians. In Japan, American nuclear bases are destroyed and chemical weapons used on the seat of government. In Pakistan, a breakaway movement in Baluchistan province, instantly recognised by the Soviet Communist Party, asks for and receives direct military intervention from the USSR to protect its fragile independence: Soviet-controlled territory extends all the way from Siberia through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean.

It may not even need a third world war for the Soviet Union to occupy Baluchistan. The Red Army may be withdrawing from Afghanistan, but knowing what we know about Soviet strategy and the uses to which *spetsnaz* can be put, such a withdrawal can be seen as a useful public relations exercise without hindering the work of *spetsnaz* in any way. With a *spetsnaz* presence in Baluchistan, the Politburo could be reaching very close to the main oil artery of the world, to the Arab countries, to Eastern and Southern Africa, to Australia and South-east Asia: territories and oceans that are practically undefended.

Appendices

The organisation of ***spetsnaz*** at army level[1]

It is wrong to think of *spetsnaz* as a separate entity. Each of the forty-one Soviet armies in wartime will have a *spetsnaz* company of 115 men. The company reports to the 2nd Department of the Army's HQ, responsible for intelligence and reconnaissance work, and is entirely separate from all other army units.


Commanding officer (major)
Deputy commander for political affairs (captain)
Deputy commander for airborne services (captain)
Explosives expert (senior lieutenant)
Interpreter (senior lieutenant)
Parachute platoon[2] (20 men)
Parachute platoon[2] (20 men)
Parachute platoon[2] (20 men)
Signals platoon (30 men)
Transport section (praporshik, 10 drivers & 10 vehicles)
Supply unit (sgt.-major, airborne stores, accountant, explosive stores, ammunition stores, clothing service, food stores/cook)
Commander (senior lieutenant)
Commander (senior lieutenant)
Deputy (senior sgt.)
Deputy (praporshik)[3]
Section (sgt. & 5 men)
Radio operators (praporshik & 4 sgts)
Signals section (sgt. & 5 privates & radio/cypher set)[4]

[1] *Spetsnaz* at army level consists only of normal *spetsnaz* units, i.e. carefully selected soldiers and no professional athletes. This situation may change, with the appearance of a platoon of athletes. There used to be a different structure for *spetsnaz* at army level, and the heads of the GRU are pressing for the old organisation to be restored. Instead of 41 companies, there would be 41 battalions of *spetsnaz* — one for each army, consisting of: the command (commanding officer and deputies); the headquarters staff (3 officers); a platoon of professional athletes (anti-VIP); three *spetsnaz* companies made up of conscripts; a signals company; a transport platoon; and support units.

In this organisation the *spetsnaz* companies are not "independent". Each one is headed not by a major but a captain. The company consists of 3 platoons and the commanders, 66 men altogether. The signals, transport, supply, accounting and all other services are concentrated at battalion level. A battalion with 360 men can at any one time send 45 groups of *spetsnaz* behind the enemy's lines, and in addition has five groups of professional athletes.

There are reliable reports that such a reorganisation has already begun. If the reorganisation is completed it will mean that *spetsnaz* has increased in numbers by 10,000 men.

[2] *Spetsnaz* platoons can be split and regrouped at will, into a maximum number of 5 groups.

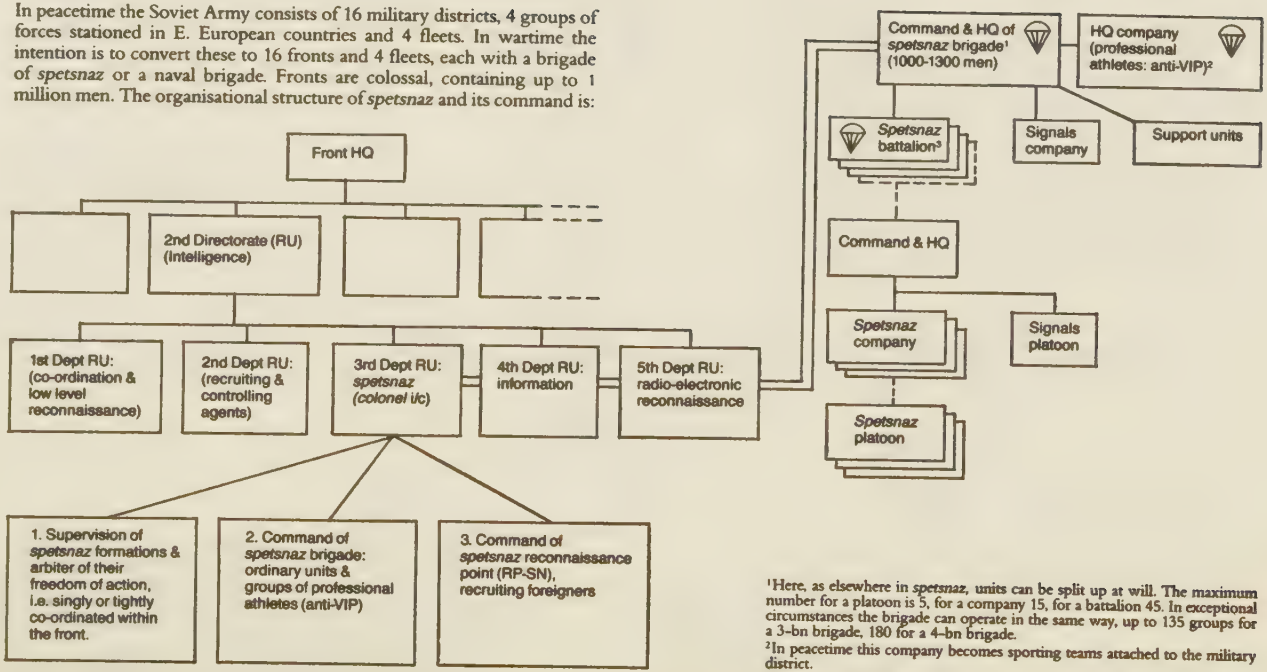
[3] The deputy is also responsible for the company's secret documents.

[4] In extreme danger the cypher operator has standing orders to destroy his cyphers and commit suicide.

The organisation of ***spetsnaz*** at front level

APPENDIX B

In peacetime the Soviet Army consists of 16 military districts, 4 groups of forces stationed in E. European countries and 4 fleets. In wartime the intention is to convert these to 16 fronts and 4 fleets, each with a brigade of *spetsnaz* or a naval brigade. Fronts are colossal, containing up to 1 million men. The organisational structure of *spetsnaz* and its command is:


Front HQ
2nd Directorate (RU) (Intelligence)
1st Dept RU: (co-ordination & low level reconnaissance)
2nd Dept RU: (recruiting & controlling agents)
3rd Dept RU: *spetsnaz* (*colonel i/c*)
4th Dept RU: information
5th Dept RU: radio-electronic reconnaissance
1. Supervision of *spetsnaz* formations & arbiter of their freedom of action, i.e. singly or tightly co-ordinated within the front.
2. Command of *spetsnaz* brigade: ordinary units & groups of professional athletes (anti-VIP)
3. Command of *spetsnaz* reconnaissance point (RP-SN), recruiting foreigners
Command & HQ of *spetsnaz* brigade[1] (1000-1300 men)
HQ company (professional athletes: anti-VIP)[2]
Spetsnaz battalion[3]
Signals company
Support units
Command & HQ
Spetsnaz company
Signals platoon
Spetsnaz platoon

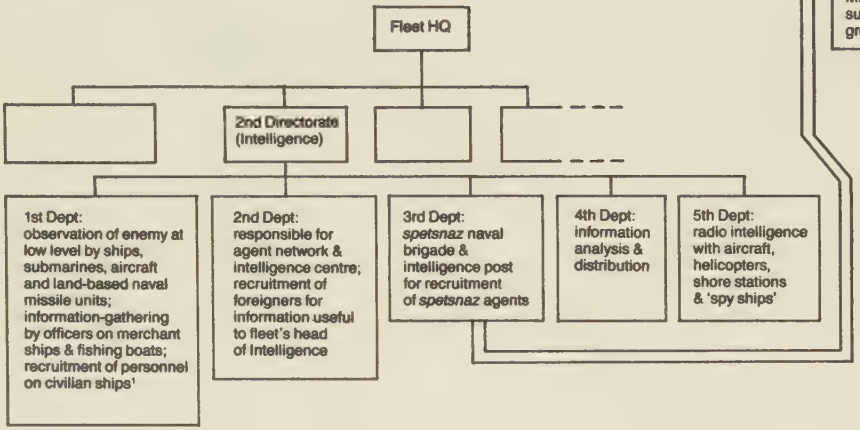
[1]Here, as elsewhere in *spetsnaz*, units can be split up at will. The maximum number for a platoon is 5, for a company 15, for a battalion 45. In exceptional circumstances the brigade can operate in the same way, up to 135 groups for a 3-bn brigade, 180 for a 4-bn brigade.

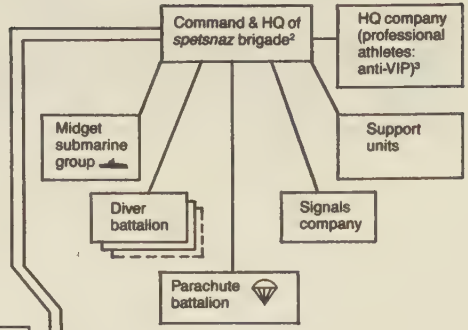
[2]In peacetime this company becomes sporting teams attached to the military district.

[3]In peacetime the brigade also acquires an extra battalion, composed of independent companies (see Appendix A) from the 2 or 3 armies in the military district.

The organisation of *spetsnaz* at fleet level

In each of the 4 fleets in the Soviet Navy there is a *spetsnaz* naval brigade along with an intelligence post. The organisation of Intelligence and *spetsnaz* is much the same as it is within an Army front, with some specifically naval features:


Fleet HQ
2nd Directorate (Intelligence)
1st Dept: observation of enemy at low level by ships, submarines, aircraft and land-based naval missile units; information-gathering by officers on merchant ships & fishing boats; recruitment of personnel on civilian ships[1]
2nd Dept: responsible for agent network & intelligence centre; recruitment of foreigners for information useful to fleet's head of Intelligence
3rd Dept: *spetsnaz* naval brigade & intelligence post for recruitment of *spetsnaz* agents
4th Dept: information analysis & distribution
5th Dept: radio intelligence with aircraft, helicopters, shore stations & 'spy ships'



[1] On every merchant ship the first officer is a man whose appointment has been approved by the 1st Department. Thus, with promotion, every captain knows the part he must play.

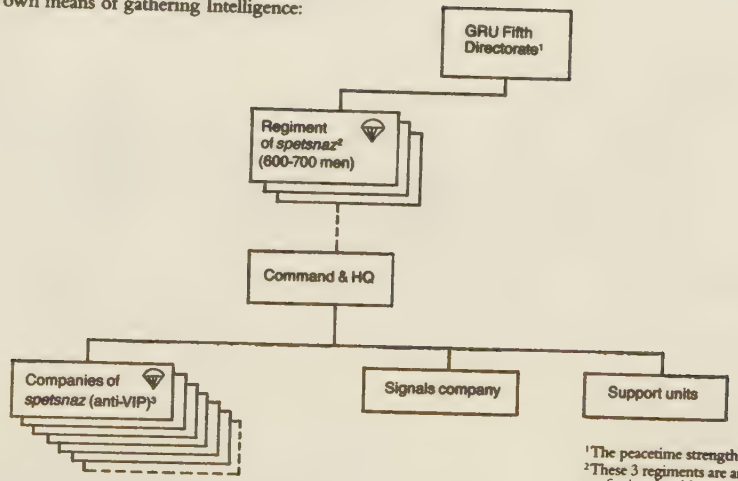
[2] The brigade is trained to operate as a powerful strike force against a single target or, in small groups, against many targets simultaneously.

[3] Of the 21 world records registered in 1985 by the World Confederation of Underwater Activities, not one was established by an athlete outside the Soviet Union.

The organisation of ***spetsnaz*** at strategic level

APPENDIX D

The Fifth Directorate of the GRU is the controlling and co-ordinating agent of *all* intelligence-gathering activities at lower levels. It also has its own means of gathering Intelligence:



[1]The peacetime strength of *spetsnaz*, excluding agents, is 27,000-30,000 men.
[2]These 3 regiments are an elite among the elite, composed entirely of top-class professional athletes. They normally act in concert under direct Fifth Directorate orders or those of a C-in-C to whose command they have been posted, attacking in the enemy's rear like a closed fist. More than 80% of standard *spetsnaz* units are placed at front and fleet level, and half of all the professional forces within *spetsnaz*. At the strategic level the ability to act in concert, and the extremely high quality of the forces, makes the top 7% of *spetsnaz* manpower by far the most dangerous.
[3]Are there *spetsnaz* agents at the strategic level? Professional athletes need their help and contact, but so far no evidence exists that any *spetsnaz* Intelligence point reports direct to the Fifth Directorate.

Appendix E

The part the Soviet athletes play

Below are a number of examples of the very close relationship between the sporting and military achievements of Soviet athletes.

Vladimir Myagkov. In the Soviet ski championships in 1939 Myagkov put up an exceptionally good time over the 20-kilometre distance, and became Soviet champion at that distance. During the war he was called into the Army and put in charge of a small unit of athletes which came directly under the Intelligence directorate of the front. He was later killed in fighting behind enemy lines. He was the first of the top Soviet athletes to be made a Hero of the Soviet Union, in his case posthumously. The tasks that Myagkov's sports unit was carrying out, the circumstances of his death and the act for which he was made a Hero remain a Soviet state secret to this day.

Porfiri Polosukhin. A Red Army officer before the war, he held world records at parachute jumping. He had been an instructor training special troops for operations on enemy territory. During the war he continued to train parachutists for *spetsnaz* units of 'guard minelayers'. He was often behind the enemy's lines, and he developed a method of camouflaging airfields and of communicating with Soviet aircraft from secret partisan airfields. This original system operated until the end of the war and was never detected by the enemy, as a result of which connection by air with partisan units, especially with *spetsnaz* and *osnaz* units, was exceptionally reliable. After the war many a soldier from special troops trained by Polosukhin became world and European parachute champions.

Dmitri Kositsyn. Before the war he headed the skating department in one of the State Institutes of Physical Culture. It was supposed to be a civilian institute, but the teachers and many of the students had military rank. Kositsyn was a captain and had some notable achievements to his credit in sport, having established a number of Soviet records. During the war he commanded a special unit known as 'Black Death'. From that 'civilian' institute, in the first week of war alone, thirteen such units were formed. They engaged in active terrorist work in support of the Red Army, and the speed with which the units were formed suggests that long before the war

all the members of the units had been carefully screened and trained. Otherwise they would not have been sent behind the lines. Kositsyn's unit acquired a name as the most daring and ruthless of all the formations on the Leningrad front.

Makhmud Umarov. During the Second World War Umarov was a soldier in an independent *spetsnaz* mine-laying battalion. He was several times dropped with a group of men behind enemy lines. He had two professions: he was a crack shot, and a doctor. After the war he was an officer in the Intelligence directorate of the Leningrad military district. He continued to have two professions, and as a doctor-psychiatrist he received an honorary doctorate for theoretical work. As a crack shot he became European and world champion; in fact, he was five times European champion and three times world champion. He won two Olympic silver medals for pistol shooting, in Melbourne and in Rome. After the resurrection of *spetsnaz* he served as an officer in that organisation, where both his professions were valued. Thanks to his sporting activities Lieutenant-Colonel Umarov visited many countries of the world and had extensive connections. In 1961 Makhmud Umarov suddenly disappeared from the medical and sporting scenes. There is some reason to believe that he died in very strange circumstances.

Yuri Borisovich Chesnokov. A man of unusual physical strength and endurance, he took part in many kinds of sport. He was particularly successful at volleyball: twice world champion and Olympic champion. Chesnokov's physical qualities were noticed very early and as soon as he finished school he was taken into the Academy of Military Engineering, although he was not an officer. From that time he was closely involved in the theory and practice of using explosives. Apart from an Olympic gold medal he has another gold medal for his work on the technique of causing explosions. Chesnokov is now a *spetsnaz* colonel.

Valentin Yakovlevich Kudrevatykh. He joined the paramilitary DOSAAF organisation when he was still at school. He took up parachute jumping, gliding and rifle shooting at the same time. In May 1956 he made his first parachute jump. Two years later, at the age of eighteen, he had reached a high level at parachute jumping and shooting. In 1959 he was called into the army, serving in the airborne forces. In 1961 he set five world records in one week in parachute sport, for which he was promoted to sergeant and sent to

the airborne officers' school in Ryazan. After that he was sent to *spetsnaz* and put in command of some special women's units. He had under his command the most outstanding women athletes, including Antonina Kensitskaya, to whom he is now married. She has established thirteen world records, her husband fifteen. He made parachute jumps (often with a women's group) in the most incredible conditions, landing in the mountains, in forests, on the roofs of houses and so forth. Kudrevatykh took part in practically all the tests of new parachute equipment and weapons. Along with a group of professional women parachutists he took part in the experimental group drop from a critically low height on 1 March 1968. Then, as he was completing his 5,555th jump, he got into a critical situation. Black humour among Soviet airborne troops says that, if neither the main nor the reserve parachute opens, the parachutist still has a whole twenty seconds to learn to fly. Kudrevatykh did not learn to fly in those last seconds, but he managed with his body and the unopened parachutes to slow his fall. He spent more than two years in hospital and went through more than ten operations. When he was discharged he made his 5,556th jump. Many Soviet military papers published pictures of that jump. As usual Kudrevatykh jumped in the company of professional women parachutists. But there are no women in the Soviet airborne divisions. Only in *spetsnaz*.

After making that jump Kudrevatykh was promoted to full colonel.

Appendix F

The Spetsnaz Intelligence Point (RP-SN)

Imagine that you have graduated from the 3rd faculty (operational intelligence) of the Military-Diplomatic Academy of the General Staff. If you have passed out successfully you will be sent to one of the twenty Intelligence directorates (RUs), which are to be found in the headquarters of military districts, groups of forces and fleets.

On the first day I spent at the Military-Diplomatic Academy I realised that diplomacy is espionage and that military diplomacy is military espionage. Successful completion of the 3rd faculty of the Military-Diplomatic Academy means serving in one of the Intelligence directorates, or in subordinate units directly connected with the recruitment of foreign agents and managing them.

Imagine you have been posted to the Intelligence Directorate of the Kiev military district. Kiev is without doubt the most beautiful city in the Soviet Union, and I have heard it said more than once by Western journalists who have visited Kiev that it is the most beautiful city in the world.

So you are now in the enormous building housing the headquarters of the Kiev military district. At different times all the outstanding military leaders of the Soviet Union have worked in this magnificent building: Zhukov, Bagramyan, Vatutin, Koshevoi, Chuikov, Kulikov, Yakubovsky and many others. The office of the officer commanding the district is on the second floor. To the right of his office are the massive doors to the Operational Directorate. To the left are the no less massive doors to the Intelligence Directorate. It is a symbolic placing: the first directorate (battle planning) is the commanding officer's right hand, while the second directorate (*razvedka*) is his left. There are many other directorates and departments in the headquarters, but they are all on other floors.

Your first visit to the Intelligence Directorate at the district headquarters takes place, of course, in the company of one of the officers. Otherwise you would simply not be admitted.

Before entering the headquarters you must call at the permit office and produce your authority. You are given a number to phone and an officer comes to escort you. The permit office

examines your documents very carefully and issues you with a temporary pass. The officer then leads you along endless corridors and up numerous stairs. You must be ready at every turn to produce your permit and officer's identity card. Your documents are checked many times before you reach the district's head of *razvedka*.

Now you are in the general's huge office. Facing you is a major-general, the head of *razvedka* for the Kiev military district. You introduce yourself to him: 'Comrade general, Captain so-and-so reporting for further duty.'

The general asks you a few questions, and as he talks with you about trivialities he decides your fate. There are a number of possibilities. Perhaps he doesn't take to you and so decides not to take you on. You will be posted to the district Personnel Directorate and will never again have anything to do with Intelligence work. Or he may like you but not very much. In that case he will send you for reconnaissance work on lower floors to serve in a division or regiment. You will be working in *razvedka*, but not with the agent network.

If you really please him several paths will be open to you. The *razvedka* of a military district is a gigantic organisation with a great deal of work to do. Firstly, he can post you to the headquarters of one of three armies to work in the headquarters' Intelligence department, where you will be sent on to an intelligence post (RP) to recruit secret agent-informers to work for that army.

Secondly, he can leave you in the Intelligence directorate for work in the second (agent network) or the third (*spetsnaz*) department. Thirdly, he can post you to one of the places where the recruitment of foreigners to work for the Kiev military district is actually taking place. There are two such places: the Intelligence centre (RZs) and the *spetsnaz* Intelligence point (RP *spetsnaz*).

The general may ask you for your own opinion. Your reply must be short: for example – I don't mind where I work, so long as it is not at headquarters, preferably at recruitment. The general expects that sort of reply from you. Intelligence has no need of an officer who is not bursting to do recruiting work. If someone has got into Intelligence work but is not burning with desire to recruit foreigners, it means he has made a mistake in his choice of profession. It also means that the people who recommended him for Intelligence work and spent years training him at the Military-Diplomatic Academy were also mistaken.

The general asks his final question: what kind of agents do you want to recruit – for providing information or for collaborating with *spetsnaz*? Every intelligence officer at the front and fleet level must know how to recruit agents of both kinds. It is, you say, all the same to you.

'All right,' the general says, 'I am appointing you an officer in the *spetsnaz* Intelligence point of the 3rd department of the Second Directorate of the headquarters of the Kiev military district. The order will be issued in writing tomorrow. I wish you well.'

You thank the general for the trust placed in you, salute smartly, click your heels, and leave the office. The escorting officer awaits you at the exit. From here, without any permits, you come out into a little courtyard, where there is always a little prison van waiting. The door slams behind you and you are in a mousetrap. Facing you is a little opaque window with a strong grille over it. No use trying to look out. The van twists and turns round the city's streets, often stopping and changing direction, and you realise that it is stopping at traffic lights. At last the van drives through some huge gates and comes to a halt. The door is opened and you step out into the courtyard of the penal battalion of the Kiev military district. It is a military prison. Welcome to your new place of work.

■ ■ ■

The ancient city of Kiev has seen conquerors from all over the world pass down its streets. Some of them razed the city to the ground; others fortified it; then a third lot destroyed it again. The fortifications around the ruined and burnt-out city of Kiev were built for the last time in 1943 on Hitler's orders. On the approaches to Kiev you can come across fortifications of all ages, from the concrete pillboxes of the twentieth century to the ruins of walls that were built five hundred years before the arrival of Batu Khan.

The place you have been brought to is a fort built at the time of Catherine the Great. It is built on the south-west approaches to the city at the top of steep cliffs covered with ancient oaks. Alongside are other forts, an enormous ancient monastery, and an ancient fortress which now houses a military hospital.

Through the centuries military installations of the most varied kinds – stores, barracks, headquarters – have been built on the most dangerous approaches to the city and, apart from the basic purpose, they have also served as fortifications. The fort we have

come to also served two purposes: as a barracks for 500 to 700 soldiers, and as a fort. Circular in shape, its outside walls used to have only narrow slits and broad embrasures for guns. These have now all been filled in and the only remaining windows are those that look into the internal courtyard. The fort has only one gateway, a well-defended tunnel through the mighty walls. A brick wall has been added around the fort. From the outside it looks like a high brick wall in a narrow lane, with yet another brick wall, higher than the first one, behind it.

Both the inner and outer courtyards of the fort are split up into numerous sectors and little yards divided by smaller walls and a whole jungle of barbed wire. The sectors have their own strange labels: the numbering has been so devised that no one should be able to discern any logic in it. The absence of any system facilitates the secrecy surrounding the establishment.

There are three companies of men undergoing punishment and one guard company in the penal battalion. The men in the guard company have only a very vague idea of who visits the battalion and why. They have only their instructions which have to be carried out: the men undergoing punishment can be only in the inner courtyard in certain sectors; officers who have a triangle stamped in their passes are allowed into certain other sectors; officers with a little star stamped in their passes are allowed to enter other sectors; and so forth.

Apart from the officers of the penal battalion, frequent callers at the fort are officers of the military prosecutor's office, the military commandant of the city, and officers of the commandant's office: investigators, lawyers. And there is a sector set aside for you. The *spetsnaz* intelligence point has no connection at all with the penal battalion. But if it were to be situated separately in some building, sooner or later people in the vicinity would be struck by the suspicious behaviour of the people occupying the building. Here in the penal battalion you are hidden from curious eyes.

The *spetsnaz* intelligence point is a small military unit headed by a lieutenant-colonel, who has under him a number of officers, graduates from the Military-Diplomatic Academy, and a few sergeants and privates who carry out support functions without having any idea (or the correct idea) of what the officers are engaged on. Officers of the penal battalion and those visiting the battalion are not supposed to ask what goes on in your sector.

Many years back one of your predecessors appeared to allow himself the luxury of 'careless talk', to the effect that his was a group reporting directly to the officer commanding the district and investigating cases of corruption among the senior officers. This is sufficient to ensure that you are treated with respect and not asked any more questions.

Its location in the penal battalion gives the *spetsnaz* point a lot of advantages: behind such enormous walls, the command can be sure that your documents will not get burnt or lost by accident; it is under the strictest guard, with dozens of guard dogs and machine-guns mounted in towers to preserve your peace of mind; no outsider interested in what is going on inside the walls will ever get a straight answer; the independent organisation does not attract the attention of higher-ranking Soviet military leaders who are not supposed to know about GRU and *spetsnaz*; and even if an outsider knows something about you he cannot distinguish *spetsnaz* officers from among the other officers visiting the old fort.

Spetsnaz has at its disposal a number of prison vans exactly the same as those belonging to the penal battalion and with similar numbers. They are very convenient for bringing any person of interest to us into or out of your fort at any time. What is good about the prison van is that neither the visitor nor outsiders can work out exactly where the *spetsnaz* point is. A visitor can be invited to any well-guarded place where there are usually plenty of people (the headquarters, commandant's office, police station) and then secretly brought in a closed van to the old fort, and returned in the same way so that he gets lost in the crowd. Fortunately there are several such forts in the district.

A penal battalion, that is to say a military prison, is a favourite place for the GRU to hide its branches in. There are other kinds of camouflage as well – design bureaux, missiles bases, signals centres – but they all have one feature in common: a small, secret organisation is concealed within a large, carefully guarded military establishment.

In addition to its main premises where the safes crammed with secret papers are kept, the *spetsnaz* Intelligence point has several secret apartments and small houses on the outskirts of the city.

Having found yourself in the place I have described, you are met by an unhappy-looking lieutenant-colonel who has probably spent his whole working life at this work. He gives you a brief order:

'You wear uniform only inside the fort and if you are called to the district headquarters. The rest of the time you wear civilian clothes.'

'I understand, comrade lieutenant-colonel.'

'But there's nothing for you to do here in the fort and even less in the headquarters. This is my place, not yours. I don't need any bureaucrats; I need hunters. Go off and come back in a month's time with material on a good foreign catch.'

'Very well.'

'Do you know the territories our district will be fighting on in a war?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Well, I need another agent there who could meet up with a *spetsnaz* group in any circumstances. I am giving you a month because you are just beginning your service, but the time-scale will be stricter later on. Off you go, and remember that you have got a lot of rivals in Kiev: the friends of yours who have already joined the Intelligence point are probably active in the city, the KGB is also busy, and goodness knows who else is recruiting here. And remember – you can slip up only once in our business. I shall never overlook a mistake, and neither will *spetsnaz*. In wartime you are shot for making a mistake. In peacetime you land in prison. You know which prison?'

■ ■ ■

That was what Kiev was like before the Chernobyl disaster. For hundreds of years barbarians from many of the countries of Asia and Europe had been doing their best to destroy my great city, but nobody inflicted such damage on it as did the Communists. The history of nuclear energy in the Soviet Union is one – very long – story of crime. The founding father of the development of nuclear energy was Lavrenti Beria, the all-powerful chief of the secret police and, as later became apparent, one of the greatest criminals of the twentieth century. The majority of the Soviet ministers, designers and engineers connected with the development of nuclear energy were kept in prisons, and not only in Stalin's time. All nuclear plants are built with prison labour. I have personally seen thousands of convicts working in the uranium mines in the Kirovograd region. (See V. Suvorov, *Aquarium*). The convicts have no incentive whatsoever to turn out good quality work.

Sooner or later this was bound to end in disaster. The paper *Literaturnaya Ukraina*[1] reported on the criminal attitude to construction work and the use of defective materials and obsolete technology at Chernobyl. The paper issued a warning that several generations of people would have to pay for the irresponsible attitude of the people in charge of the building work. But nobody paid any attention to this article or others like it; a month later the catastrophe took place.

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[1]27 March 1986.

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